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THE MAN WITH THE RED WHISKERS SNATCHED THE BOX AWAY WITH ONE HAND, WHILE, WITH THE OTHER, HE SEIZED SONDAZ BY THE THROAT.

OR,

The Treacherous Two.

A ROMANCE OF THE RING.

BY GEO. C. JENKS,
AUTHOR OF "THE DRUMMER DETECTIVE,"
"SLEEPLESS EYE," "THE GIANT
HORSEMAN," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A VILLAIN FOILED.

"ROUND again! Head up! One foot, now! Houp-la! Steady! Through the hoop! Ah, clumsy! Try again! If you don't go through clean this time, I'll—"

Cr-a-a-a-ck!

A long whiplash circled and quivered in the air with a report like that of a rifle-shot. It was a significant conclusion to the sentence, and seemed to be a fitting accompaniment to the loud, harsh tones that uttered the exclamation.

The place was a circus-tent pitched on a large, vacant lot off Grand River avenue, Detroit. This thoroughfare is one of several that run from the center to the outskirts of the city, and

it has for many years been the camping-ground of nearly all the circuses that have found their way to Michigan's principal city.

It was about nine o'clock in the morning, and the immense tent, with its hundreds of rough, empty seats, its untidy sawdusted ring, its dirty painted tent-poles, with a shining gilt acrobatic apparatus—trapeze bars, etc.—dangling from iron braces high above the ground, looked about as dreary as anything that can be conceived.

A dull morning, with heavy, leaden clouds scudding across the sky, dipping occasionally so low as almost to obscure the flag-pole with its flapping Stars and Stripes that reared itself from the highest point of the great canvas. It looked as if it would rain before the afternoon performance, and this probability, added to a naturally saturnine disposition, had the effect of imparting a little extra acerbity to the always uncertain temper of the ringmaster.

He was a tall man, with a fierce, black beard and mustache, and with black eyes to match.

He wore a suit of large check and a large blue silk handkerchief loosely knotted about his powerful neck. His sack coat was buttoned all the way down, revealing a compact frame of almost herculean proportions, while the easy movements of the straight, sinewy limbs betokened the trained athlete.

The other occupants of the ring were a red-faced man, playing a big drum—playing it, that is, as well as a man can "play" a big drum without any other instrument to assist the melody—and a boy of perhaps twelve years of age riding around the ring on a barebacked white horse.

The boy was standing up, and with a small riding-whip in his hand, was urging the white horse around, and going through various tricks of jumping, standing on one foot, and so on, in obedience to the commands of the man who wielded the long-lashed whip.

The whip cracked again and flicked the white horse, causing him to quicken his pace with a jerk.

"Hold on, thar!" shouted the ringmaster. "Tumble off that horse and I'll skin yer alive, yer young varmint. Durned ef I know what yer'r made of."

The whiplash shot out threateningly, and the boy cowered.

"I couldn't help it, Fixer. The horse has a way of jerking, and if I didn't watch myself I never could stay on at all."

"Shut yer mouth, yer young whelp! Who yer talkin' ter, d'yer think? Bud, time up thet thar drum!"

His last sentence was flung at the red-faced man, who, sitting in a chair in the middle of the ring, had suspended operations on his big drum temporarily to listen to the controversy between Sol Fixer and the boy.

"All right, Sol. Let her go!" he wheezed, as he began thumping away at his drum in time with the gallop of the horse.

Sol Fixer picked up a hoop from the ground, and held it for the boy to jump through the next time the horse came around.

The boy ducked, and missed the hoop.

"I wasn't ready that time, Fixer," he pleaded. "Let the horse get his stride. Old Bob knows as well as I do when we are both ready."

"I'll lick you, and Bob too, the next time, if ye don't go through," warned Fixer.

He was standing on a stool so that he could hold the hoop properly, and at a convenient height, or he would probably have given each of them a lash with the whip then, as an earnest of future attentions.

Bud, the drummer (his full name was Budworth Buddicombe), shook his head deprecatingly, and worked vigorously at the drum.

"Don't be too hard on the kid, Sol. He's doin' the best he knows how," he expostulated.

"Muster Buddicombe, I believe you're paid a salary to bang the big drum in this circus, ain't yer?" asked Sol, with laborious politeness, as he turned and looked at the red-faced man in indignant astonishment.

"Yes."

"Wal, 'tend to your partic'lar business. When I want ye ter act as assistant manager I'll let ye know."

Bud's only answer was to drum a little harder, but he drew his breath between his set teeth, and felt that he would have given half a week's salary to have Sol Fixer's head under his drumsticks.

The white horse got his stride this time, and the lad went through the hoop three times in succession in such good style that Fixer condescended to give an approving nod, and, by gathering up his whiplash and turning his back toward the boy, signified that he could enjoy a few minutes' rest.

"This business of training kids in the mornin' is wuss than the performance in the afternoon an' evenin', shoot me ef it isn't," growled Sol, as he wiped his forehead with a corner of the silk handkerchief and kicked up the sawdust irritably.

The boy, sitting on the white horse overheard the remark, and a tear that he hastily dashed away sprung to his eyes.

He was a little fellow, and looked very forlorn and pitiful as he sat on the large horse.

Ten minutes' rest, and the exercise began again. The boy had learned all the tricks he was going through, and had, in fact, performed them in public, but Sol Fixer had noticed a little lack of grace and ease the night before, and, according to the custom of circus-riders and managers, had decided that another rehearsal was necessary.

Fixer was ringmaster and part proprietor of the Great Astronomic Circus and Menagerie, and was king of the empire bounded by the white tents and menagerie wagons.

"Now, Tim, try and do this hyer act without a break twice, and we'll lay off fer ther mornin'," said Fixer, as Bud's drum gave the signal for the white horse to commence his gallop.

"I'll try, Sol."

"Let her go, then!"

The act that the boy was to perform was a very difficult one. It was to turn a double-somerset through a hoop, alighting on his feet on the horse's bareback.

A great deal of rosin and chalk had been rubbed on the horse so that he would not afford a slippery footing for the young acrobat, and the shoes of the latter were also prepared with rosin.

"Bud, play that drum in strict time, won't you?" cried Tim, as he started the horse.

"All right, my covey! Trust Bud Buddicombe to know his business—even if he ain't a manager," he added, with a sidelong glance at the ringmaster.

The horse galloped around the ring, once—twice.

"Now, look out, boy. I'm er-goin' to nut up this hyar hoop."

"All right!"

Sol took a hoop over which a sheet of thin paper had been pasted. He thrust his fist through it and mounted his stool.

"Round once more," he growled. "I guess ye warn't ready thet time. Mind thet drum, Bud!"

Tim's teeth were clinched and his elbows squared as he dashed around. Standing partly on his toes, he looked neither to the right nor left, but kept his eyes fixed on the hole in the paper made by Sol Fixer's fist.

Bud thumped away at the drum, as he watched with quickened pulse the horse and rider tearing on the sawdust.

"Now, Tim! Whoop!" yelled Fixer.

"A tremendous bang on the drum, a whirling vision of white tights and canvas shoes, and the boy was through the hoop."

He turned over and over, a double-somerset and then—fell flat on his back on the horse, and rolled off.

Before Fixer could voice the always ready malediction the boy was up and dashing around the ring on the horse once more, with the sawdust clinging to his hair and the back of his white practicing costume.

"I couldn't help it, Fixer. Bob kind of caught up his stride. Get another hoop and I'll do it without a hitch. See if I don't!"

"Ye'd better!" was Sol's significant response.

He was evidently getting annoyed. He picked up another hoop, made a hole in the paper, as before, and held it up.

Tim went around the ring once to get Bob up to a good pace, and then the second time braced himself for the tremendous effort required for a double-somerset.

On he came, like the wind! He timed his distance exactly, his muscles tightened and he left the horse's back for the supreme moment.

Just as he sprung, however, his glance wandered for a second in the direction of the flap of canvas that formed the door of the dressing-room.

"Look, Sol!" he shrieked.

The power suddenly left his limbs at the very instant that he leaped.

Once he turned in the air, and then, struggling convulsively he tumbled over in a senseless heap at the feet of the ringmaster.

"Vat is ze matter? Caramba! Ze boy has fainted, eh, senor?" asked a soft voice.

In the doorway, holding the canvas flap aside, stood a swarthy man, with a great deal of white surrounding the black iris in his wide-open eyes, and with a long pointed mustache, one end of which he twirled with his slim fingers. He was well-dressed, in a black Prince Albert frock coat, light trousers and shining silk hat. He showed considerable white shirt, cuff and collar, and his toilet throughout indicated that his personal appearance was by no means a secondary consideration with him.

As he stood there, smiling broadly, so that a double row of even white teeth were displayed under the black mustache, he looked very like a large black cat enjoying the discomfiture of a mouse that had just fallen a prey to its claws.

"Poor boy! S'al I peek him up? My! He is all over ze blood from zis wound in his head! Too bad! Too bad!"

He walked forward as he spoke and looked into the unconscious face of Tim, as his head lay in the lap of the red-faced drummer.

"Go and get some bandages out of the medicine trunk, Sol," said Bud, taking no notice of the new-comer.

Fixer, without a word, disappeared behind

the flap to the dressing-room to get bandages and other conveniences for impromptu surgery that are always carried by circuses.

"Ze boy is not mooch hurt, eh, senor?"

"Dunno!" answered Bud, shortly. He did not like the appearance of the swarthy man.

"Will you let me look at ze boy? I am something of—of—ze doctair. I haf sometimes put bandages on ze picadors at ze bull fights in Mexico."

"Mexican, eh? I allers know them Greaser blokes as soon as I see 'em," muttered Bud. Then aloud: "If you can do anything, why go ahead."

"Ah, thanks, mine friend! Let me see ze boy."

The Mexican passed his hand over the boy's head and limbs, and found, by a very superficial examination, that the sufferer had sustained only a scalp-wound that would soon heal.

"Caramba!" he muttered, as he fumbled at his white shirt-cuff with the fingers that it half-concealed.

"Well, what do you make of it?" wheezed Bud, who was watching the Mexican closely.

"Oh, it is ze bad eenjury. I see zat he has fallen on a spike or something zat has run into hees heat. Look! Here! Zis!"

As he uttered these words in his soft voice, the swarthy man was bringing the hand, fumbling at the shirt-cuff, nearer and nearer to the boy's bosom.

"A spike? There ain't no spikes around here," observed Bud, as he looked about.

"No? Zat is vere you vas meestaken."

The furtive fingers and the white cuff were touching the boy's bare chest now.

There was a quick, cat-like movement, a gleam of blue-bright steel, and Bud's heavy drumstick swung in the air and knocked a dirk-knife from the Mexican's hand!

"Caramba!"

"I don't care a cuss for yer cranberries, or whatever it is you are talking about. What were you trying to do with that knife?"

"Zat knife?" repeated the other.

He stooped to pick it up but Bud placed his heavy foot upon it.

"Let it stay there, Mr. Cranberry! I don't think it is safe to trust it in your hands."

The Mexican shrugged his shoulders.

"Vell, zat is as you please. I vas only going to put ze cold steel against his flesh to make ze swelling go down. But, Caramba! You don't know vat I do, and you suspect zat I—"

"Yes, I do suspect," interrupted Bud. "You hit it right that time, my covey."

Tim moved slightly, and then, with an effort, opened his eyes.

"What's the trouble, Bud?" he asked, faintly.

"Did I miss my tip?"

"Yes, that's all, my boy! Yer just missed yer tip an' dropped on the sawdust. But, you're all right now. Keep quiet till Sol comes back with the bandages and arnica, an' you'll be as good as new."

"Perhaps he vill be so mooch better, hey?" put in the soft voice of the Mexican, as, Bud having inadvertently moved his foot from the dirk knife, its owner picked it up and returned it to its sheath in his right coat-sleeve.

The boy started.

"Look here, my good friend, suppose you go outside and get the air. See if it's going to rain, and find out which way the wind is blowing. Let it blow through your whisk—I mean, your mustache, for a while. You're a jolly nice fellow, but the boy don't like yer. D'ye see?"

Bud uttered these disjointed sentences so earnestly that they lost the twang of nonsense which would otherwise have detracted from their influence.

The Mexican shrugged his shoulders, and, taking from his pocket a package of cigarette paper and some tobacco, rolled a cigarette dexterously with his fingers, and holding it and a match in one hand, in Mexican fashion, lighted it and puffed away with an air of extreme satisfaction.

"Did you hear me, Mr. Cranberry?"

"Ye-es!"

"Well, git!"

"Vhy should I geet?" asked the Mexican, quietly, as he watched the blue smoke curling from his lips.

"Because it's against the rules for strangers to be in the tent during rehearsals; and, another thing—"

"Vell?" interrupted the Mexican calmly.

"You've got to go," shouted Bud, in a rage. The stranger's sang-froid and insolence were becoming unbearable.

"Vell, of course, eef I moost, vhy, Adios!" raising his silk hat with his left hand.

"Oh, good-by if that's what you mean!" responded Bud, impatiently.

The Mexican smiled broader than before, and turned toward the doorway. He raised the flap half-way, and then, starting back, threw away his cigarette and drew his knife.

"Caramba!"

He darted forward, with the blade upraised. As he did so, a slightly-built young fellow, nobbily dressed, stepped through the canvas doorway, and, seizing the Mexican's wrist, twisted it apparently without effort, and sent

the knife spinning to the other end of the tent.

"Caramba!"

"Precisely! I had a presentiment we should meet again before long, Senor—"

"Hush!" pleaded the Mexican, in agony, as his lips whitened and could not be kept closed over the white teeth.

"Oh, all right. I don't care about mentioning your name now, if you don't wish it. But, take my advice and keep away from this show, or you'll find yourself in trouble. You know me, eh?" said the young man carelessly, caressing his blonde mustache with a remarkably white hand.

He flung the Mexican away from him as he spoke, and pointed toward the doorway.

With a look of devilish hate on his dark face, the Mexican lifted up the flap, and—met Sol Fixer.

"Pardon, senor! Vat you call zis gentleman?" pointing toward the blonde young man who was now leaning over Tim, and inquiring whether he felt much pain.

"Well, the public know him as Lightfoot the Bareback Rider, but we call him Hey Rube!"

"Ab, yees; zat is good. Down in Vera Cruz I haf heard him called Reuben Rocket. But I shall not forget zis Hey Rube. It is a vera good name. I zank you, senor."

CHAPTER II.

Mlle. Rosa's Jewels.

It was evening. The crowd was besieging the ticket-wagon and pouring into the circus tent to witness another performance of the much-heralded Great Astronomic Circus.

The fakirs in the side-shows were trying to persuade the people to step in and see the fat lady, the living skeleton, the Circassian beauty, the tattooed woman, and the thousand-and-one attractions that are always part of a big circus.

"Plenty of time to see all the wonders before the performance begins in the big tent. Step this way. Just going to begin the lecture on the greatest collection of curiosities ever gathered under one tent. Walk in, ladies and gents. Only ten cents to see the whole exhibition, with a chance at the \$50,000 prize drawing thrown in. Walk up! Walk up!"

A very small, puffy man, with a tremendous voice, was standing on an old wooden chair at the doorway of a tent upon the front of which were hung a number of glaring paintings representing freaks and curiosities of all kinds such as were never actually seen in a tent or any where else.

It was his voice that was calling upon the gaping throng to come up and see his wonders, and his persuasive eloquence was bearing good fruit in the way of dimes and curiosity-mongers.

A tent-man—that is, one of the *attaches* of the circus whose duty it was to help raise and lower the tent and assist in packing the property of the show for conveyance on the railroad—here stepped up to the little man and made him a sign.

"All in to begin! For the last time, ladies and gentlemen, I invite you all to come in and see the greatest aggregation of wonders that the Nineteenth Century can produce! Don't hesitate, ladies and gents, for this is your last chance!"

A few more listeners were beguiled into the tent by this final appeal, and then the little man went inside, and secured the flap of the tent, leaving a boy to stand at the entrance to take the money of any belated individual who might desire to see at least part of the wonderful performance.

"The Circassian beauty!" proclaimed the little man, in opening the exhibition, as he signaled for the hand-organ to cease its grinding and led from behind a folding screen a young girl with her hair stiffened with beer and shellac so as to stand out from her head in every direction.

She was a remarkably pretty, modest girl of perhaps eighteen years of age, and in spite of her barbarous costume, and the ridiculous way in which her hair was arranged, bore about her somehow the stamp of good birth and breeding.

"She was purchased in the market-place of Stamboul," went on the lecturer, "and was destined for a life of slavery, when one of my agents, always on the lookout for curiosities to please the great American public, saw her, purchased her for ten thousand sequins and brought her to this country, where of course she could not be a slave any longer."

"Just think o' that now," was the whispered comment of a deeply interested female with a baby in her arms, who stood in the front row of the spectators.

"Yes, ladies," went on the lecturer, seeing the impression that he had made, "we pay this young lady a salary of \$250 a week, and she cannot speak a word of any language save that of her own beloved native country, Circassia. She will pass among you with her photographs at the conclusion of the entertainment, selling them at ten cents each. Though she cannot speak English she has learned to make change in American, so you need not hesitate about

buying a photograph if you have not exactly the ten cents. She can change anything up to a five-dollar bill."

Here the lecturer paused for breath, and the young lady, with a forced smile that was most painful to see, staggered aside while he introduced the fat lady and began a wonderful fairy tale concerning her.

The girl sat down on a gilded chair and looked disconsolately about the tent. Then her eyes became fixed, as she saw something in the rear of the audience that made her blood run cold.

"Fernando Sondaz!" she murmured. "What does it mean?"

The lecturer was still dilating upon the weight, size and beauty of the fat lady, when the Circassian girl retreated behind the screen and tried to collect her thoughts.

"What does he want? Where has he come from? I thought I had seen him for the last time!" she wailed.

The answer to her question came sooner than she expected. A curtain that concealed an exit from the tent that was used by the performers, was pushed aside, and the swarthy face of the Mexican whose treachery so nearly cost the boy Tim his life in the forenoon, appeared in the opening.

"I want to speak wiz you," he whispered.

The girl started.

"If you are caught in here you are likely to be in trouble," she said.

"S'all I? I think not. I want you. You understand, eh? You know me, eh?"

"Yes—Heaven help me!—I know you."

"Yees. I thought so."

"You cannot speak to me here."

"Then you come out, eh?"

"I must change my dress."

"Vell, I wait outside, wiz my cigarette, so!"

And the Mexican was gone.

The girl hastily assumed her ordinary clothing of private life, and soaking her hair for a few minutes in warm water, was able to confine it in a cap over which a large hat easily fitted.

Then, without a word to the puffy lecturer she slipped out and joined the Mexican.

"So you haf come?"

"Yes!—Why are you here? I thought you were in Vera Cruz, or in that neighborhood."

"I vas. But I haf beezness here."

"No good, I suppose."

Fernando Sondaz shrugged his shoulders, and throwing away his cigarette, ground out the fire with a savage twist of the heel that conveyed a greater expression of hatred toward some one than could be expressed in words.

"Yes, it is good—good for me, and you will help me. You understand, eh?"

"Tell me what you want?" muttered the girl in a hard voice. "I suppose I must listen to you."

"Yees, I suppose so, eh? You are my—"

"No, no. Do not say that," interposed the girl, hastily, putting her hand toward his mouth, as if to prevent his speaking.

He seized her by the wrist, and in a violent manner, thrust her hand to her side.

"I vill say eet. Why not? You are ma vife, and you know it, eh?"

It was with a look of malevolent hate that he uttered these words, and the girl shrunk under them and moaned pitifully.

They were walking around the big tent, from within which the sounds of galloping horses, loud brass music and the shouts of riders came in gusts that at times made it difficult for them to hear each other speak.

A loud roar of applause shook the very tent-pole and made the ground under their feet fairly quiver. Then the strains of an old-fashioned minuet arose from the brass band, the measured bang-bang of the big drum giving evidence that Budworth Buddicombe, Esq., was working with a will in contributing his share of the music.

"What's that?" asked the girl, starting.

"Vat vas it you mean, eh?"

"Oh, nothing! I thought I heard a moan, but of course it is only fancy. Tim was hurt a little, while practicing this morning, and I'm nervous. That's all."

"Oh, vas zat all, eh? Vell, I vonder how long the show will last, eh?"

"A long time yet. It isn't half through. That is Mlle. Rosa's music. She is doing her manege act with her trained mare. She is a great favorite here."

"Mlle. Rosa!"

The Mexican for the moment dropped his mask of carelessness and became deeply interested.

"Yes, she is always good for two encores. Have you ever seen her?"

Fernando Sondaz had recovered himself, and it was with his usual coolness that he answered: "No, I haf not seen her."

"Well, what do you want to see me for? I suppose you do not mean to stay with the show, and tell people about our relationship. If you did, you might have to keep me, and I know that would not suit you."

"No, it would not. I'll tell you vat I want."

He whispered a few sentences in the girl's ear, and she started back in horror.

"No, Fernando, I cannot do that. I am not a thief."

There had been a listener to this conversation that neither the Mexican nor the girl had suspected. A young man, apparently, with a fringe of the red whiskers that are usually known as "Irish sluggers," probably because no one ever saw an Irishman in real life wearing such whiskers. He wore on his head a battered white felt hat. The rest of his clothing was a blue-jean blouse and overalls. He was evidently one of the tent men, waiting until the entertainment inside had progressed far enough to warrant his commencing to pull down the tent about the ears of the audience, after the manner of circuses in general.

At the word "thief," uttered energetically by the young girl, he drew nearer to the couple, keeping behind the wagon, and listened intently.

"So," he muttered, "Senor Fernando Sondaz, you're at your old tricks again, are you? Seems as if you might have had sense to know that I can take you for that shooting scrape of yours at Leadville three years ago, and that I am likely to do it if you don't lead a quiet life here."

The man with the red whiskers did not get an opportunity to hear any more of the conversation of the Mexican and the girl, for they kept away from his sheltering wagon, and if he had moved nearer to them he must have exposed himself, and thus lost all hope of learning their plans.

At last he saw the girl draw her cloak closely around her, and, leaving her companion, go back into the side-show tent, which was now in process of demolition, for the whole circus was to be exhibited at Monroe the following night, and would be on board the cars before most of the present audience were in bed.

Then he saw the Mexican move carefully around the big tent until he got to a certain spot. Taking from his sleeve a knife, the counterpart of that which had been wrested from him by Reuben Rocket in the morning, he cut a hole in the canvas and looked in.

Then he dropped upon his hands and knees, and, like a snake, wriggled under the tent, out of sight.

In a flash, the watcher with the red whiskers was standing on the spot from which the Mexican had disappeared.

He knew that the only possible way for the latter to escape from the private dressing tent which he had entered was back under the tent.

"At last, Senor Sondaz, I shall have to bring your lively career to a close. I almost hate to do it, for you are such a cool scoundrel that I positively admire you."

It will be noticed that the man in the blue overalls and red whiskers did not talk like a person who would be likely to earn his daily bread by the commonest manual labor. That may be explained later on.

He had not long to wait.

In a few seconds there was a slight agitation of the canvas near his feet, and then the black hand of the Mexican protruded, followed by the body of that enterprising gentleman.

He stood up before he saw that he was not alone. Then he half-drew his ever-ready dirk, but put it back with a smile that showed every one of his white teeth in the moonlight.

In his hand he held a small box covered in plush and fastened by a brass lock and gilt clasps. Evidently a jewel-case.

The man with red whiskers snatched the box away with one hand, while, with the other, he seized Sondaz by the throat and held him with an iron grip against the tent.

The Mexican's left hand sought his pocket—the red-whiskered man watching him closely the while—and drew forth his cigarette papers and tobacco. He held them up inquiringly.

"By heavens, you're a cool scoundrel!" muttered the tent-man, as he released the Mexican's throat. "Yes, make your cigarette. You deserve a smoke for your impudence."

Without any sign of hurry or discomfiture the Mexican rolled his cigarette and lighted it in the peculiarly dexterous manner to which reference has already been made. Then he placed it between his lips and puffed at it delicately, emitting two or three whiffs.

"Ah! zat is ze goot cigarette. Vell! Adios!"

He turned coolly away and waved his slim fingers at the other, who, hugging the red plush jewel-case to his bosom, looked at the Mexican with a mingled expression, of which amusement was the most pronounced element.

"Stay!"

"Vell, I stay. You want me, eh?"

"Yes."

"Why? Haf you not ze jewels? I not geet anything after taking all ze risks. Caramba! You hold ze trump card. Vat would you haf?"

"This. I would have you keep away from this show. Remember, senor, I know you. I saw you teasing that girl to-night."

"Which girl you mean, eh?"

"You know! Alice Trevilyan."

"She is ma wife!"

"You lie! But, that doesn't matter. Let her alone. Do you hear me?"

"Yees, I hear you, vell. *Adios!* I must sleep. I haf long journey before me."

Not another word did the Mexican say, but strolled easily and carelessly away, puffing at his cigarette, and evidently perfectly satisfied with himself and the world at large.

The red-whiskered man watched him till he disappeared. Then he looked at the red plush box in his hands and smiled contentedly.

"What a fool the fellow is, with all his cleverness!" he muttered. "He might have known that somebody would be watching Mademoiselle Rosa's jewel-case, now that the newspapers have let everybody know that she has them in her dressing-tent during every performance. Those diamonds of hers are enough to tempt all the crooks in the country."

He pulled up the lid of the box, which he had already found was unlocked.

"I like to look at diamonds," he said, softly, "even if they are not my own."

He opened the lid, gave one look at the contents, and then as he passed his fingers in among them, fairly groaned:

"By all the gods, the fellow has fooled me! Reuben Rocket, you're an ass! He has taken out the diamonds, and filled the box with earth and stones!"

As he uttered these words in agony of spirit, the speaker pulled the red whiskers from his face as if they were choking him, and the moonlight showed the delicate features and blonde mustache of Hey Rube, who will henceforth in this narrative be shown in his true character of an iron-willed, and, where crime is concerned, a pitiless detective.

CHAPTER III.

A TREACHEROUS BLOW.

FOR two or three minutes the detective stood as if petrified, but his brain was busily at work.

He might have stood there longer than he did, but suddenly a dozen excited people poured out of the private entrance at the back of the tent, that was used by the professionals.

"Thar he is, by gracious! Standin' right thar with ther box in his hand. Grab him, boys!"

Sol Fixer it was who thus spoke, and his hand was laid heavily on the detective's shoulder, before he recognized that he had made a mistake.

"Halloa! What are you doing hyer, Rube, an' whar did yer git that thar box?"

Without a word, Reuben handed the jewel-case, with its worthless contents, to Fixer, but before he could take it, Mademoiselle Rosa herself, dressed for her bare-back performance in the arena, and, with nothing but a short cloak thrown loosely around her to conceal her short, gauzy skirts and spangles, sprung forward and snatched the precious box.

Shutting it with a snap, she ran back into her dressing-room. Scarcely had she disappeared, when she was back again, nearly frenzied. She had discovered the loss of her jewels.

"Mademoiselle Rosa, we must look into this thing later. I know who the thief is, and I will guarantee that your jewels shall be returned to you within a week—if you will trust me."

It was Rube Rocket that spoke, and there was a world of quiet confidence in his tones.

The circus-rider looked at him for an instant.

Then taking his hand, she looked him full in the face, and said, heartily:

"Mr. Rocket, I will trust you. But tell me who the thief is."

"Do you really want to know?"

"Yes, really."

"You had better not."

"Perhaps so, but you know that women are said to be naturally curious. I am no better in that respect than the rest of my sex," answered Mlle. Rosa, with a slight smile.

"Well, suppose I should say that the thief is a man whom you well know?" whispered the detective.

"I?"

"Yes; some one whom you have not seen lately, but whose name is as familiar to you as your own."

"My own," she repeated, unconsciously.

"Yes. One who has had more to do with you than any one in this neighborhood."

"Ah!"

"One whom you had hoped had gone out of your life forever, but who has traced you to Detroit—an easy enough thing, considering that your name is continually in the papers as a famous circus performer."

The girl was standing now with her hands clasped, as if she longed, yet dreaded, to hear the explanation of the detective's words. Her cloak had blown wide open, and her spangled, short, white dress, glistened in the moonlight.

All the rest of the people who had come out of the tent at the first alarm of the robbery had gone inside again, and Reuben Rocket and Mlle. Rosa were alone.

"You surely don't mean that this thief is—is no it cannot be!" she murmured.

"It is—"

Rube hesitated.

"Yes, yes. For mercy's sake, go on—"

"It is—Fernando Sondaz."

"Ah!"

Mlle. Rosa, with a low cry, staggered and would have fallen had not the detective supported her.

"Oh! That he should be here! What have I done to deserve it?" she wailed.

"Nothing—nothing, and you shall not suffer at his hands again. I promise you that. He has outraged every law, and he shall answer for his crimes before he is much older, as sure as my name is Reuben Rocket."

The detective shook his clinched fist in the air as he spoke, and the girl well knew that he meant what he said.

"Mlle. Rosa, we are waiting to play your entrance music!" interrupted Sol Fixer, putting his head out of the flap in the tent.

"I'm coming," she answered quickly, as, with an effort, she recovered her equanimity. Then, turning to Rube, she whispered, as she gave him her hand again: "I rely upon you."

"Till the death!" was his response.

He stood still, where she had left him, thinking. He heard the crash of the band as her horse dashed into the ring, and a moment later, the roar of applause as Mlle. Rosa herself bounded forward and prepared for her wild bare-back ride.

He was so familiar with the proceedings of the circus that he could stand outside the tent at any time and tell exactly what was going on within.

"Now, Fernando Sondaz, we have commenced a struggle that will last until you are behind the bars of a State Prison, or—I am dead," he muttered, as his steel-blue eyes snapped and his nostrils dilated with indignation. "Not only for robbery do I want you now, but that justice may be done to two young girls who have been terrorized by you too long. Alice Trevilyan and Rose Hartley are henceforth under my protection. So, you yellow-skinned scoundrel, beware!"

It may be well, at this juncture, to explain that Reuben Rocket was a member of a powerful detective agency of Mexico, who had been detailed to travel with the Astronomic Circus in the hope of discovering the source of certain robberies and other infractions of the law that had been puzzling the police for some months. Besides being an astute detective, Rocket was known as an athlete who added to a muscular, lithe frame, the courage of a lion. As he had, moreover, a few years before, been a member of a circus company, and had achieved some reputation as a bare-back performer, he was able now to take his place with the Astronomic Aggregation as a regular performer, thus hiding his real profession. One man connected with the circus knew that he was a detective, and had found it out, two years before, by being caught up by Rocket on a charge of horse-stealing in Arizona. That man was Sol Fixer, now ringmaster and part proprietor of the Astronomic Circus. The charge of horse-stealing, though undoubtedly sound, could not be sustained, and Fixer escaped punishment. But Reuben Rocket, or "Hey Rube," as he was called by the troupe, always fancied that Sol had never forgiven him for putting the handcuffs on him at the muzzle of a six-shooter in Arizona two years before.

At the time this story opens Rocket had been traveling with the circus about three weeks, having joined it in Chicago.

The clouds that had been gathering all day now massed in solid gloom over the face of the moon, and Rube stood in deep shadow, thinking up his plans. He had been in the ring and had given his performance early in the evening, and was free now to do as he pleased. He had made this arrangement when he joined the company.

"Fernando," whispered a voice, almost in his ear.

Repressing a start, he answered, "Yes."

"I am here, Fernando. What am I to do?"

"Don't you know?" he asked, in a guarded whisper.

"I know you said you had something to do here to-night, and that I was to take the parcel that you would give me, and wait for you at the ferry-dock at the foot of Woodward avenue."

"Ah! Well, I haven't got the parcel yet," returned the detective, in the same low whisper. Then, suddenly changing his tone, he exclaimed:

"Alice, don't you know me?"

"Mr. Rocket!" she cried, joyfully.

"What have you to do with Fernando?" he asked, coldly.

"How can I tell? You know that he is my cousin; that he has a paper which he says makes him the guardian of Tim and me; that he will, by my father's will, be his heir if I do not marry him within a year from now, and that I shall be disobeying my father's last wish if I do not do so."

"Yes, I know he has such a paper, but you have nearly a year in which to prepare yourself for the marriage, and there is no need to worry yourself or let him make a slave of you now."

"I'm afraid of him."

"Exactly. But you need not be."

"I thought when I heard he had been killed in the City of Mexico that I should never see him again."

"Of course; but men like Fernando Sondaz do not seem to get killed, somehow."

"Caramba! No! But ze meddling fools who try to take away ma wife do get ze knife!"

As these words were hissed in his ear, Rube felt a sharp pain in his side, and, as the warm blood ran down inside his shirt, he realized that he was stabbed.

"Caramba! Now? How ycu like zat, eh?"

Rube did not fall. Accustomed to danger, and no stranger to blows and wounds, he realized almost instantly that the knife had missed its mark, and, instead of piercing his heart, as was doubtless his assailant's intention, had glanced off and had inflicted nothing worse than a flesh-wound in his side.

Pressing his hand instantly to the spot, he turned and seized the Mexican by the throat and bore him backward to the earth.

"Missed it that time, Fernando!" exclaimed the detective, coolly. "Your intention was good, of course, but your aim was a little wild."

"Caramba! No. Zis will do ze work!"

Wriggling like a snake from Reuben's grasp, the Mexican half-rose and struck with all his force at the other's breast.

Again he was foiled in his murderous intention. A girl's hand caught his wrist this time, and though her strength was not sufficient to stop the blow altogether, she turned it aside, so that it only cut the detective's blue-jean sleeve.

"Caramba! You are von leetle fool! So!" he spluttered, as, in a blind fury, he lunged at her with the dirk and stabbed her slightly in the arm.

"You cowardly villain! I'll wring the miserable life out of you!" cried Rube, in uncontrollable indignation.

He seized the hand that held the knife with an iron grip, and, with one twist of his heel, laid the Mexican flat on his back.

"Now, you cur, give me that dirk!"

He did not wait for the prostrate ruffian to comply with his command. He wrenched the weapon from him in no gentle manner, and, kneeling on his chest, seemed for the moment inclined to bury the weapon in his throat.

"No," he muttered; "I can't kill even such a thing as you are in cold blood. I'll just take you to the station-house and have you locked up in a respectable legal fashion. It's more than you deserve, but no one shall say that Reuben Rocket ever showed want of respect for the laws of his country."

Alice stood tremblingly by, stanching the blood that flowed from the wound in her arm with her handkerchief. She did not know whether to be pleased or sorry that the detective and Fernando had met. She was in such mortal terror of the Mexican that she could only think of the revenge he would take if he did manage to escape the vigilance of the Tent Detective.

All the events narrated above had taken place so quickly that only a minute or two had elapsed since she first called, as she thought, to Fernando. Now, she could hardly realize that he was lying at her feet, a prisoner in the hands of the fighting detective.

"Alice, take this knife while I make this gentleman comfortable," said Reuben, cheerfully.

"Vat you mean to do wiz me, eh?" gurgled the Mexican, for Rube still held him by the throat.

"I'll show you in a moment, my Greaser friend."

The detective drew from an inner pocket a pair of bright steel handcuffs, which flashed even in the gloom of the night so that the prostrate villain could see them.

"You vill handcuff me, eh?" he asked, with a slight tremble in his voice, in spite of himself.

"I will."

"Ah!"

In a business-like way, the detective prepared to adjust the manacles, while the sounds of merriment from 3,000 people came through the tent by their side—a fitting illustration of the contrasts that life affords in every instant of time and in every quarter of the globe.

"Work a little stiff, you see, Fernando. They are quite new. They will enjoy the honor of being used for the first time on the wrists of as great a scoundrel as ever escaped the hangman—for a time," remarked the detective.

"Caramba!"

"Certainly! Now, Fernando!"

The shining steel, cold and merciless, touched the Mexican's wrist making him shudder.

"Caramba!"

Helpless, he offered his hands for the gyves when, suddenly, a brawny fist struck the detective behind the right ear, knocking him senseless.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CIRCUS BATTLE-CRY.

"CARAMBA! Zat vas vell done," exclaimed the Mexican as he shook himself loose from Rube's nerveless hold and arose to his feet.

"Thet's all right, senor. I guessed what you'd

done when I saw them thar stones an' things in ther box. You're er slick one, you are!"

The ringmaster stood over the prostrate detective and bestowed a kick upon him with much heartiness and good will.

"Cuss him!" He went on. "I know him. He thinks I've forgiven thet thar Arizona business, but when I do may I rot! I'll git even with him yet, sure ez my name's Sol Fixer."

"You came at ze right time now, eh?"

"Yes, I suspected what ther game was, an' I thought I might be useful. Rot him! I gave him a good one, too."

He looked down at the detective, and the moon coming from behind the clouds, saw that he was beginning to show signs of life.

"You'd better git from here, Fernando. He's comin' to. Whar will I see you ter-night?"

"Ze old place!"

"Belle Isle?"

"Yees—at two o'clock, sharp, eh?"

"All right."

"How about ze circus?"

"It goes away right after the show."

"And you?"

"I don't know. I may not go with it. I shall not go in the ring to-morrow anyhow. I have got Sam Simpson, ther head groom to take my place in Monroe, and he may stay thar, if I find anything else that may pay me better, yer know."

Sol winked expressively, and there was an evil gleam in the Mexican's eye in response.

"Wha—what—?" broke from the pale lips of the detective, as he began to have a dawning consciousness of existence.

"Caramba!"

The Mexican's hand flew to the hilt of his dirk.

"Hold on thar!" whispered Sol. "It wouldn't do to rub him out now. Ef it would I'd ha' done it myself."

"But—"

"All right, senior. Leave him to me. Belle Isle at two o'clock. Git!"

He gave Fernando a push as he spoke, and the Mexican, repressing his evident desire to drive his weapon to the detective's heart, waved his hand to Sol and disappeared in the darkness.

At the same instant, Alice Trevilyan, who had been hiding behind a wagon, where she had been unobserved by the two rascals, but where she had heard every word of their conversation, ran swiftly in the direction of the principal entrance of the big circus tent.

Rube, after one or two efforts, staggered to his feet, when Sol Fixer gave him his hand and supported him.

In a moment the detective had recovered himself and looked keenly into the ringmaster's face.

"Somebody struck me from behind," he said, quietly.

"Yes; I heard a scuffle from inside the tent. So I kim out, an' just ez I got outside I see'd a feller hit you in the ear an' git. Then another feller, ez you had downed afore, he got up an' sneaked away too. Who wuz ther fellers? Do yer know em?"

"Yes, Sol, I do know them—both," was the significant answer.

"Um! I'm glad of it."

"Is the show nearly over? Yes, I can hear that it is. Well, I'm going inside. I want to talk to Mlle. Rosa," Rocket explained.

He had quite recovered from the stunning blow, and was on the alert now to solve the mystery of the attack upon himself as well as the power held by Fernando Sondaz over Mlle. Rosa and Alice Trevilyan.

"Did you see any one else besides the two men just now, Sol?" he asked.

"Nary a one. Who d'ye think wuz hyar? Some more of the gang that laid you out?"

"No; never mind," was the careless reply, as Rube pushed aside the flap of the dressing-tent and entered.

"I won't be able to keep my hand off'n that feller another day, I know," muttered the dark-visaged ringmaster, following him into the tent.

The brass band was thundering forth the music for the grand acrobatic rally that generally brings a circus performance to a conclusion.

A dozen tumblers were turning flip-flaps and somersets in the ring, over the backs of an elephant and ten horses, and doing it, too, without breaking their necks, though the risk of such a denouement was continually present.

The room in which Sol and the detective found themselves was that in which the performers generally sat when not in the ring. It was full of trunks, stout, squarely-built chairs for acrobatic feats, whips, paper-covered hoops (now at the end of the show, torn and twisted), clown's cone-shaped white felt hats, and other miscellaneous litter that had been hastily thrown down after being used in the ring.

Sol, whip in hand, strolled into the ring, to slash the clown about the legs, and give him an opportunity to express comic agony.

The Tent Detective was thus left alone, but only for an instant.

He had scarcely dropped upon one of the trunks to think up a plan for circumventing the

Mexican, when a light touch on his shoulder caused him to look around quickly.

"Ah, Alice! I wanted to see you. Where have you been?"

"I did not want Sol Fixer, or—or—Fernando to see me, so I kept out of sight until you came in here. Then I ran around the front way and came here," panted the girl, breathlessly.

"I should think you did run," observed the detective, kindly. "It is a good thing your heart is sound, or you might make yourself ill with so much violent exertion. True as you live."

Hey Rube smiled in a peculiar way that somehow always filled the young and innocent with confidence in him, though it was just as effective in striking terror to the heart of villainy.

Alice Trevilyan thought Reuben Rocket's smile the most beautiful thing in nature.

"Rube!"

"Yes."

"I overheard their plans, and—" commenced Alice, quickly.

"Hold on, my girl! Not so fast. What did you hear, and who did you hear it from?" interrupted Reuben.

"Why, Fernando and—" She stopped.

"Well?"

But the eyes of the girl were fixed on something behind Rube, who was sitting with his back to the opening that led into the main tent.

He turned, but saw nothing but the flap of the tent waving slightly, as if stirred by the draught—and every one knows that a circus tent is always draughty.

The girl resumed, but in a whisper:

"Fernando and—Sol Fixer."

The detective started, and a smile altogether different to that he had bestowed upon Alice curled his lips.

"It was Sol who knocked you down from behind," she went on, still in a whisper.

"Yes?"

"I saw him do it."

"I suspected him," commented the detective, quietly. "Go on."

"Then he talked to Fernando in a way that showed they were partners in something—no good, I am sure."

"Of course not. When two such gentlemen put their heads together, the result is seldom good."

"I think that Sol told Fernando how to get Mademoiselle Rosa's diamonds, and that they are to divide them, and each take half."

"An equitable arrangement, I am sure. They are evidently men of business integrity. What else did you hear, Alice? Talk low."

"I will. Sol Fixer put his head into the tent a minute ago, and I expect he is listening, or trying to listen, outside now."

"Let him listen, as long as he cannot hear what you say. Tell me what else you heard them say."

"They are to meet on Belle Isle at two o'clock in the morning, to arrange something. Fernando spoke of it as the old place, so they must have been there before."

A loud crash from the band at this juncture told that the performance was at last at an end, and before Rocket could reply to the girl's last remark, the acrobats, hot and tired after their exertions in the ring, came rushing into the little apartment, and applied themselves eagerly to a large crock containing oatmeal and water, which they ladled out in tin mugs, and drank with every indication of extreme enjoyment.

Among them was a boy, who, pale and panting, had evidently overtaxed his strength.

"Tim," cried the girl, as she darted forward and took his hand. "Sit down, dear, on this trunk, while I get you a drink."

She led him to the trunk on which sat the detective, and taking a tin mug from one of the men, who had just disposed of about a quart, brought the mug full of oatmeal water to the now nearly fainting lad.

"Thanks, Alice! That was very nice," said the boy, feebly. "I don't feel very good to-day, and Sol made me take that longest leap with the rest of them."

"Did you make it?" asked Rube.

"Yes, indeed, I did; didn't I, Budd?"

"Clean as a whistle," was Budworth Buddicombe's sententious answer. "But it was a shame to make a little cove like you go over all them there animals when you was tired before-hand."

"I got a big round of applause for it too," continued the boy, as his face lighted up in triumph. "So I was glad I did it, though it hurt me some. Wasn't that a big hand I got, eh, Budd?"

"Yes; you're a favorite in Detroit, there's no kind of doubt about that," acquiesced the hoarse man, "and I helped you through with the drum, too, eh, didn't I?"

Bud was a great stickler for his drum, and always wanted credit when he thought it his due, wherever he might be.

"Yes, Bud, your drum always helps me when I'm going to take a long jump. Just before I gather myself up, I always say quietly, you know, so that no one can hear me—"

"Yes," said Bud, nodding eagerly.

"I always say to myself: 'Now, Tim, wait till you see Bud's drumstick in the air, as high as he can swing it. Then—go!'"

"Yes, yes!" from Bud.

"Well, then, I go, and just as the drum gets a whack I always land, safely on my feet, on the mattress, and the people cheer. That's the way it goes."

"Right, right, Tim! For a little cove, you have a better idea of what is due to a musician than any one else that I ever knew."

Bud, who had been leaning on the side of his big drum, swinging his drumsticks in unison with the boy's discourse, let his drum fall over in the ecstasy of the moment, and, taking Tim's two hands in both his own, shook them until the boy's teeth chattered.

"Now, Tim, I want yer hyar," interposed a harsh voice—that of Sol Fixer, as the ringmaster stepped from the big tent.

"What d'ye want, Sol?" asked the boy, turning pale. "Have I done anything wrong?"

"Come out hyar an' I'll show yer."

The boy walked slowly toward the entrance to the main tent, the detective and Alice following. The other acrobats who had taken part in the "rally" had adjourned to their dressing-tent during Tim's recital of his manner of turning somersets in the ring.

The last of the audience had been emptied out of the tent—this being the more easily done because the tent-man had commenced to pull down right away, and had already furled it up on all sides, making exits in every direction.

In the ring, standing disconsolately opposite the doorway from the dressing-tent was Old Bob, the white horse upon which Tim Trevilyan performed his equestrian feats.

"Git up on that thar boss!" commanded Tim.

"But, Fixer, I—" faltered the boy.

"Git up on that thar boss I tell yer!" repeated the ringmaster flourishing his long whip, threateningly.

The boy, with an appealing look at his sister, Alice, walked slowly across the ring, and then, from sheer force of habit, put one hand on the horse's neck, and vaulted lightly upon his back.

Bud had followed with his drum, and began pounding away in time with Old Bob's gallop. It is a well-known fact that circus performers' horses as well as human beings, cannot go through their acts properly without at least the beat of a drum to mark time for them. Many of them require certain airs played on musical instruments before they will attempt a difficult feat.

"Now, then, yer little whelp, I'm a-goin' ter see if yer can't do that double-somersets clean," growled Fixer, as he picked up a hoop that he had thrown into the ring a minute before.

"What for, Sol? I did it all right to-night," expostulated the boy.

"That wuz only by accident. Yer tumbled all over yerself at ther rehearsal this mornin'," was the savage retort. "I'll make yer do it right if it breaks every bone in yer skin!"

"But, Mr. Fixer, he is not fit to do it now. He is not well, and he's tired out after the work of the day and night—two performances."

"None of yer business. When I want you to run this hyar ring I'll let yer know," snarled Sol. "Tune up thar, Budd!"

Budworth Buddicombe obediently hammered at his drum, and Tim, with his little riding switch in his hand urged the white horse around the ring.

Once, twice, he went around, and then Alice, clutching the detective's arm, whispered:

"Rube, the boy is fainting. See how pale he is!"

"He is pale, but he is not fainting," was the answer. "Keep quiet for a few moments."

Sol, on his stool, held up the hoop, and yelled: "Now, you Tim, once more around and then through double, y' understand?"

"Yes, Sol."

A cut from the long whip and Old Bob quickened his pace, while Sol Fixer prepared to hold the hoop before the boy as he came around.

Tim was very pale, and Rube saw that he was swaying slightly as he stood on the horse's haunches, and that the staidness was not altogether the result of Old Bob's movement but was caused by sheer weakness on the part of the little tumbler.

"Now! Houp-la! Steady! Take her flying! Houp-la!" yelled Sol Fixer, excitedly after the usual manner of circus-men.

The boy was swaying more and more, and still the black-bearded devil with the long whip and hoop urged him on.

"Hold!" shouted the detective, as he sprung to the horse's head and stopped him.

"What's that?" demanded Fixer, in a voice of thunder, as his black eyes blazed with fury.

"This has got to stop right here!" replied the detective, in determined tones. "This boy is not fit to practice now, and he sha'n't do it."

"Why, durn your infernal impudence!" hissed Fixer, in low tones of intense rage, as he fumbled in his pocket, apparently for a weapon, while his lips turned white with passion. "I'll—"

"Take your hand away from that pocket!"

"Do you hear?" commanded the detective, as, like a flash, he drew a six-shooter and pointed it at the other's head.

For half a moment the two men thus faced each other, Sol with his hand clutching the butt of a revolver that he dared not draw, and Reuben Rocket covering him with his weapon, and ready to pull the trigger at the first hostile movement of his antagonist.

Alice and Bud watched them breathlessly while Tim, still standing up on Old Bob, who had stopped his gallop, would have liked to interfere had he known what to do.

"Take your hand away from that pocket, Fixer."

"Why?" suddenly.

"I'll give you just while I count three to do as I tell you. One—two—"

"Hey Rube! Hey Rube! Hey Rube!"

Three times were these words yelled from the dressing-room behind them, and a man in the dress of a laborer, whose appearance was markedly that of a "Bowery b'oy," sprung into the ring, waving a short truncheon of hickory, which Bud recognized at once as a "toe-stake"—that is, a stake to which, when driven into the ground, the ropes of the tent are secured.

"Hey Rube! Hey Rube! Hey Rube!" he yelled again, as he danced around the ring, waving his toe-stake.

"What is it, Munch? Town toughs?" asked Bud.

"Dat's what. All der smart Alecs in town goin' to clean out der sukkus! Well, I guess not!" he returned, as he pulled his cap over his eyes, stuck out his chin, and squared his elbows, in the approved fashion of "a bad man."

CHAPTER V.

TIM VOLUNTEERS FOR A PERILOUS DUTY.

As many of our readers are doubtless aware, the words "Hey Rube!" are the signal given by the *attaches* of a circus when the blackguard element of a town or city threatens to take possession of the property of the circus and commit the wanton mischief that is so dear to the heart of the sneaking law-breaker.

At the first cry of "Hey Rube!" everybody connected with the show is expected to leave his occupation, whatever it may be, on the instant, and, seizing some weapon that will be useful in a shindy, rush to the rallying-point, whence the battle-cry has come. The idea is not to kill; hence deadly weapons such as pistols and knives are not generally employed, but clubs, that will knock a man senseless and render him *hors-de-combat* for the time, are chosen.

The handiest clubs are the toe-stakes, which lie around by hundreds. With these weapons, which circus-men learn to wield with great dexterity, a hundred toughs are easily kept at bay by half the number of tent-men.

Circus fights are not as common now as they were some years ago, but occasionally a crowd of loafers will form an invading army and try to "clean out a circus"—generally with disastrous results to themselves.

At the first cry of "Hey, Rube!" Sol Fixer drew his hand from his pocket, and, apparently forgetting all about his quarrel with Rocket, turned his back upon him and looked toward the rear of the tent.

"By Caesar! the toughs are out, that's er fact," he muttered. "Wal, er good job, too. Any kind uv er row suits me ter-night."

Running toward the edge of the tent he stooped and tore up a toe-stake that had already been loosened by the tent-men.

Swinging the weapon over his head, he shouted, with Munch Jones, the Bowery b'oy: "Hey Rube! Hey Rube! Hey Rube!"

Then he dashed away toward the corner of the great common, where, in the shadow of a clump of tall poplars the fight had already commenced.

Reuben Rocket replaced his pistol in his pocket and turning toward Alice, said:

"Keep away from this part of the common till the trouble is over. This is no place for young girls."

"But—I'm—" hesitated Alice.

"Tim will go with you."

"Yes, that is what I want," acquiesced the girl.

But, Tim was not to be disposed of so easily. He wanted to take a toe-stake and sail in with the rest, and he said so.

"No, no, Tim, it won't do. Go across the common with your sister. Take your clothes from the dressing-tent, and you can put them over there behind the fence. No one will be able to see you there."

"I'll put on my clothes but I'm coming back to join in the fun!" replied the boy, with a willful toss of the head, as he ran into the dressing-tent to find a haven of refuge for it.

"Alice, you go over there by the fence, as I told you," urged the detective, hurriedly.

"Tim will join you. I'll see to that. Go. I'll come to you myself as soon as this fight is over. There is important business to be done to-night."

The girl pulled her wrap around her, and without another word, tripped swiftly over to the high fence that divided the circus grounds

from the public thoroughfare, known as Grand River avenue.

By this time the fight had commenced in earnest.

There were at least two hundred young men and half-grown boys drawn up in battle array under the poplars.

It must be explained that down the center of the common on which the circus-tent was erected was a road bordered on each side by a row of poplars which grew on banks some four feet above the road, the latter having been cut through to conform with a grade established by city councils some time before.

The road ran from south to north.

On the eastern bank of the road, under the poplars and sheltered by their trunks and by bushes where any could be found, were the assailants of the circus. They were led by a tall, sinewy fellow, of perhaps thirty years of age, who bore in his dress and bearing unmistakable signs of being a sailor. In his hand he flourished a marlinspike, and he was altogether a most formidable-looking foe.

He had scattered his men well along, and, in the darkness, it was hard to distinguish them from the trees under which they were marshaled.

They were armed with all sorts of weapons—handy-billies and ax-handles being the most common.

The captain had just led on an attack upon the circus-men, but having been driven back, with several broken heads among his troops, was now taking a few minutes' breathing spell before charging again.

He had much the advantage in position, as well as in numbers, but his fighters lacked the disciplined efficiency of the circus *attaches*, who had been through fifty such engagements, and had learned the importance of strict system in warfare.

The town men's bank was at least a foot higher than that on which the circus people were gathered, and they had moreover more trees on their side to protect them from assault.

Sol Fixer had taken command of the circus-men, and had disposed them as advantageously as possible behind the tree-trunks in the vicinity.

Reuben Rocket, notwithstanding that his prowess in a previous ruction had already gained him his sobriquet of "Hey Rube, the Circus Fighter," modestly put himself under the orders of his late antagonist, and was ready to obey him implicitly while the fight with the town toughs continued. At such a time, Reuben considered that private quarrels must be dropped for the general good.

Neither he nor Sol gave the slightest token that they remembered being opposed to each other in deadly hate only a few minutes before.

"Rube, keep on my right, hyar, an' keep them thar varmints from runnin' up this hyar bank alongside of this clump of bu-hes. I guess they'll try it."

"Very well."

"Yer see, ef they one't git up hyar, they'll hev us all in er lump, an' they kin knock the life out uv us afore we kin give 'em one swipe. D'ye see that?"

"You are right."

"Well, then, watch 'em!"

"I will."

"Take ten men. Hyar! These ten will do. Jim Swan, you an' the animal gang take yer orders from Hey Rube," he added, turning to a stout, thick-set man at his side, who had charge of the men engaged about the menagerie.

Jim Swan, a very taciturn individual, but a devil in a fight, did not answer, but nodding to the members of his gang, walked along the bank to the spot which the experience of Sol Fixer told him needed special protection.

It was very dark, the moon having gone down, and the heavy, scudding clouds obscuring what little light the stars might have given.

Fixer's orders had been given in a whisper because he knew that the captain on the other side was listening, and was moreover sharp enough to take advantage of any information that he might surreptitiously obtain.

He particularly wanted to guard that portion of the bank to which he had assigned the detective. It had been broken away by rain, or in some other way, and a pathway was thus formed, up which it would be easy for a man, or a score, to run to the top of the bank, and meet the enemy on its own ground.

Rube placed six men, including Jim Swan, on one side of this path, and stationed himself with the other four opposite.

The detective and all his men were armed with toe-stakes, and were prepared to give the foe a very warm reception should they attempt to force a passage up the pathway.

All was quiet.

Suddenly a shower of stones came flying across the road in the darkness.

One struck the detective on the shoulder, but did not hurt him seriously. Jim Swan did not escape so lightly. A round stone of considerable size and weight, caught him in the cheek and laid him low. The rest of Reuben Rocket's contingent were hit by the stones, but no particular damage was sustained. In the darkness the

town men could not take aim with any certainty, but could only throw in about the direction of their adversaries.

"Drop!" cried Rube, in a whisper, as soon as the first volley reached them.

Every man fell flat upon his face.

The wisdom of this proceeding was shown immediately, for another, another and another fusillade of rocks was tendered them.

Nearly all went over them, as they lay on the ground, but an odd one now and then dropped upon them or struck their heads or shoulders.

The foe were taking all chances, and were aiming in every direction where they thought there was a probability of hitting somebody.

After the fourth volley there was a lull.

Not a sound of pain, dismay or defiance had come from the circus-men, and the captain on the other side did not know exactly what to make of the silence.

He gave a whispered order to his men to "Cease firing," and took counsel with himself as to the next most eligible move. He did not consult any of those around him, because he considered that he knew more about the matter than any one else could tell him.

"Up, boys," whispered Rube, when he had satisfied himself that no more stones were to be feared for a time, at least.

At the word of command, all his men arose save Jim Swan. He was stunned.

Fortunately, a flask of brandy was in the pocket of one of the gang who had the handling of snakes and who always kept the liquor in his pocket in case of a bite.

A little of the spirit rubbed on Jim Swan's forehead, and a goodly quantity poured down his throat recovered that hero at once, and he soon announced himself almost as good as new, save for a slight dizziness.

"Rube," whispered Sol Fixer, coming quietly up in the darkness, "what do yer make of all this hyar?"

"They are having a little talk, I guess," answered the detective. "They've been treating us to a stone-yard, but they are through for the present."

"Hev'n't retreated, eh?"

"Look across the road, there! See anything?"

"Nothin' but trees."

"Nothing shining?"

"That's so. By gosh! What is it?"

"Buckle on a belt."

"Wal, wal," exclaimed Sol, admiringly, in spite of himself.

"Where there's a belt there is probably a man, especially as we can see the buckle continually moving."

"Cert."

"And where there is one man, on such an occasion as this, there are probably a great many more men, though we can't see them."

"Sure!"

"But I don't go altogether on the belt buckle, notwithstanding that that is good proof. There was a big crowd over there a few minutes ago, throwing stones. That crowd could not have moved away without our hearing them."

"True. Wal, we've got ter do somethin'. We can't stand hyer all night. Ther boys want ter git ther stuff down to the train, but they're afraid ter commence movin' it while these hyar toughs are standin' around full o' mischief, d'ye see?"

"I say, let us jump for 'em in a body, an clean 'em out," put in Jim Swan at this juncture.

Mr. Swan, a man of rather slow perceptions but strong convictions, was beginning to labor under the impression that he had somehow suffered an indignity at the hands of the enemy by being knocked senseless with a stone, and his soul now cried aloud for somebody's blood.

"I don't think it would be wise, with our small force, to put our heads in the lion's den, as it were," observed Hey Rube, quietly.

Jim Swan was secretly disgusted with this sentiment, but as the bravery of the detective could not be questioned, he did not say anything.

"You may be right, Rube, but what are we ter do, d'ye think?" said Sol Fixer, thoughtfully.

"The proper thing to do is plain enough to me," remarked the detective.

"What is it?"

"To send somebody over there secretly to reconnoiter."

"What we used to call a spy in ther war, eh?" asked Sol Fixer.

"Precisely."

"Wal, who's goin' ter do it—me?"

"No. We want an innocent-looking young man, who would not attract notice, but would pass easily for some curious individual from the city. But he must be sharp and quick, and ready to fight his way through, if necessary. That's the kind of spy, as you call him, that we want."

"An' whar are we to get him, I should like to know?" exclaimed Sol.

"Yes, where?" added Jim Swan.

"Here!" interposed another voice that, guardedly low as it was, all three recognized at once.

"What?" from Sol.
 "Yes, I'll go. I'm not afraid, and I bet you I'll find out all about them."
 "Well, I'll be darned!" gasped Jim Swan.
 The volunteer was none other than the boy, Tim Trevilyan.

CHAPTER VI.

THE ROYAL BENGAL TIGER.

SOL FIXER was undecided, for the moment, whether he ought to shake hands with the boy or knock his head off for his presumption.

While he was trying to make up his mind, the detective saved him the trouble by whispering sternly to the boy:

"Tim, you go right over there by the fence where your sister is, and stay out of this affair."

"Oh, Rube, won't you trust me? I sha'n't get hurt, and I want to show you and Sol that I am good for something."

The detective hesitated. Before he could speak again the boy had disappeared.

"The young monkey!" muttered Rube. "He has a sure way of gaining his point, by simply taking it!"

"Hey, Rube! Hey, Rube! Hey, Rube!"

The battle-cry resounded from the other end of the line in Munch Jones's voice, and then the rattle of sticks and the shouts of men told that a fierce conflict was in progress in that quarter.

"Hey, Rube!" responded Sol Fixer, as he bounded away, flourishing his toe-stake.

Nearly all the circus-men followed him, but the detective remained where he was.

"Hey, Rube!" suddenly bawled Jim Swan, as if it had just dawned upon him that there was a fight somewhere in which he ought to participate.

He had already made a movement toward the rallying point, when Reuben grasped his shoulder and checked him.

"Stay here! You are under my command."

Jim did not reply, but he stopped.

"We must defend this path here. That's our duty. The boys at the other end can attend to everything down there," observed Reuben.

He looked around him, and made out in the darkness that his ten men were still in the positions in which he had placed them.

Hardly had he made this observation when there was a rush up the little pathway, accompanied by yells like those of a band of Comanches.

A brawny fellow, flourishing a handy-billy, seized the detective by the throat, but the next instant was rolling back over his followers under a well-directed blow from Rube's fist.

The fellow was not the sailor already referred to, but was equally formidable in appearance.

With an oath he recovered himself, and again flew at the detective, while his companions charged upon the ten menagerie men.

Rube now grasped his toe-stake, which he had hitherto held carelessly in his left hand, and prepared to use it instead of his fist in future exchanges of compliments with the enemy.

The big town tough got a good grip on the detective and the latter realized at once that he was in the hands of a practiced wrestler.

Both held a weapon in the right hand—Rube his toe-stake, and his assailant a "billy." With their left hands they had each other by the right wrist, and, braced with all the strength of their steel-like muscles, neither could gain an advantage over the other.

Though almost too dark to see each other's faces, their warm breath, as they panted for the mastery, could be plainly felt.

Each had his teeth clinched and they felt for the time as if everything depended upon the result of the struggle.

The battle raged fiercely around them. Jim Swan had already stretched two of the attacking party in the road, and was laying about him with his toe-stake in the most valiant manner. His blood was up, and he felt equal to fighting the whole army single-handed.

His companions were also working away with a will, but there seemed to be a never-ending procession of toughs coming up the pathway to take the places of those who were driven back.

The noise was indescribable! The battle-cry of the circus-men resounded from a hundred throats, to which the enemy responded with shouts of defiance, and declarations of their intention to throw the whole circus into the river.

Rube and his assailant took no notice of anything around them. Neither uttered a word, and for a few seconds did not attempt to do anything but hold their ground.

Then the detective, throwing forward his right foot, while he braced himself firmly on his left, twined his leg around that of the other, and tried to overthrow him.

He might as well have tried to uproot one of the poplars that overshadowed him. The sturdy form of his foe remained unshaken in spite of his greatest efforts.

Locked in this terrible embrace, and each clutching the other's wrist with all his strength, they were so exactly matched that no one could have told to whom the victory would eventually fall.

Suddenly the town man released his leg, and half-turning his body, forced back the arm of

the detective until it seemed as if it would be wrenched from its socket. Then, with a mighty effort, he pushed Rube against the edge of the bank so that it struck him just below the knee behind. The result was what would naturally be expected. Rube fell over on his back with his antagonist on top of him.

This position was not maintained for more than a second, however. Directly the detective was on top, then the tough, then the detective again.

The two rolled over and over down the path, until they lay in the mud of the road.

Rocket managed to get his right arm free, and raising his toe-stake, was about to bring it down on the head of his foe. Before he could do so the latter wriggled out of his hands, and was lost in the gloom.

Rube jumped to his feet, but in the darkness could not see anybody.

The noise had ceased in his vicinity, and down the road, where the fight had been going on fiercely from the first, there were only occasional shouts of "Hey Rube!" with no answering yells from the enemy.

He rushed up the pathway that he had so valiantly tried to defend, and which he found now by the merest accident, but none of his force were there.

"Jim!" he cried.

No answer.

"That's funny. Where has everybody gone, I wonder?"

"Rube!" said a faint voice at his elbow.

"Tim!"

"Yes, it's Tim. Don't be angry, Rube. I did the best I could, but that big sailor found me out at once, and held me back so that I could not give warning."

"Where were you during the fight?"

"I was dodging about trying to help, but it seems as if a boy can't do much in a fight, somehow."

The boy spoke so pitifully that the detective had not the heart to remind him that he had told him so before the struggle commenced.

"Ah, well," he said, "you are a good boy, Tim, and I'm glad you are not hurt."

"Oh, no, I am not hurt, but one of the town fellows fell on me when he was knocked down by Jim Swan and squeezed all the breath out of me. So I don't feel very good just now."

Ere Rube could reply he was seized on both sides by strong hands, while a stern voice said:

"That's right. He's one of the ringleaders. Bring him along."

Rube shook himself loose, but was immediately secured again.

"Here, quit that, or I'll hit you a kick wid me mace," threatened the man on his right hand.

The detective smiled to himself, as he whispered in the ear of the speaker a few words.

"Is that so? Yis, be the powers an' so it is. Sure I beg yer pardon, Muster Rocket. I tuk ye fer that blackguard what's been raising all the ruction."

Rube found himself free at once, and was soon listening to the explanations of the sergeant of police and his two patrolmen who had arrested him in mistake for the town tough with whom he had lately had such a desperate struggle.

It was to the intervention of a strong body of the police that the sudden ending of the fight was due, without the toughs taking possession of the circus or throwing it all into the river, after all.

A diligent scouring of the whole neighborhood proved that the attacking force, which had in the thick of the fight numbered considerably over 200, had retreated in good order, taking their wounded, if there were any, with them, after the manner of the Indians, whose style of warfare they had imitated.

Lanterns now made their appearance in the grove, showing that the circus-men were determined to make up for the loss of the half-hour that had been consumed in the fight, and were hurrying with their arrangements to get the circus paraphernalia packed on the special cars belonging to the "Great Astronomic Circus and Menagerie."

Now that the common enemy had been disposed of, Rube thought it probable that Sol Fixer might attempt to renew the quarrel with him, and he kept his eyes open with a view to such a contingency.

But nothing apparently was further from the ringmaster's thoughts. His sole aim in life at present seemed to be to get the tents and other possessions of the circus on the cars, and started for Monroe, some twenty-five miles away. The time that he would have spent in trying to make Tim go through his double-somersets act had been occupied in the fight, and the ring was already lumbered up with scantling, trunks, barrels and other litter.

Sol dodged about hither and thither, giving orders to the men and occasionally putting his hand to the work when necessary. If he retained any ill-will toward Reuben Rocket, he did not show it, and if the detective had not known the treacherous nature of the man, he might have been thrown completely off his guard.

As it was, he watched and waited.

Alice and Tim stood in a corner by the big fence, where Budworth Buddicombe and his precious big drum were also installed, for Bud would never trust his instrument to the tent-men's mercies. They were all three watching the busy scene with the listlessness of familiarity, and Bud at least was yawning. He knew it was of no use going to the sleeping-car until everything was packed, for sleep would be impossible in the hubbub.

The lanterns flitting hither and thither, and four big pine torches stuck in the ground at intervals, and all flaming high, gave plenty of light, of a fitful kind, to the scene.

The detective was in deep thought. He did not know exactly what to do, until he could see what plan of action Sol Fixer had marked out for himself. That he and Sondaz had some diabolical scheme on hand he felt certain, but did not quite follow it to the end as yet.

The tent-men, none of whom had sustained any particular injury in the battle with the toughs, worked with a will, and by one o'clock in the morning not a vestige of the tents and only a few of the wagons were to be seen in the Grand River avenue grove.

Everything else had gone down to the railroad outside the depot, and was filling the cars in the neat manner that is such a marked feature of circus-packing.

Four wagons remained on the grounds—each of them containing a wild beast. Two elephants, fastened to stakes by heavy chains around their feet, stood quietly behind the wagons, which were drawn up in a row near the fence.

Sol Fixer leaned against one of them, wiping his brow with a corner of the blue silk handkerchief. He was hot and tired. He looked carelessly over at Hey Rube, and from him to Tim, Alice and Bud, but did not speak to any of them.

"One o'clock," thought the detective, "and he is to be at Belle Isle by two. He cannot do it. It is three miles up the river from here, at least. There is something in the wind that Alice does not know anything about, or else he suspects that he is watched. I'll wait another half-hour before I do or say anything."

The driver of the wagon nearest to him here got upon his seat, and touched up the four horses hitched to the vehicle.

As he did so an awful roar broke from the interior.

"Old Leo is not in a very good temper this morning, I guess. That's the worst of lions. They always get tiresome at night," observed the detective, to no one in particular.

The driver took no notice of the roar but drove on toward the wide gate that led to the avenue. He was followed by the next wagon, from which a growl, not so loud as the roar of the lion, but quite as terrible told that a Royal Bengal tiger was confined in the gayly-painted cage, which was so closely boarded in.

"Hurry out o' thar with them thar wagons, fellers," shouted Sol. "Now, Jim, come on."

Jim Swan, armed with a sharp elephant hook, was guiding the two great creatures toward the gate, they coming between the first wagons and the other two behind. He did not think it worth while to answer Sol, because he considered that he was doing as well as he could, in driving his elephants, and there was no excuse in wasting speech.

The first wagon had passed through the gateway and the second was following, when one of the elephants, apparently in a spirit of playfulness, tried to force his way through just as the two leading horses were half-way from the grounds through the gate.

There could be but one result.

The huge bulk of the elephant took up the larger portion of the space, and the horses were crowded against the gate-post.

The wheel-horses kicked as the leaders swerved, and the next instant the wagon had dashed against the gateway, and turned over on its side.

The driver, used to everything, fell with the wagon until it was near the ground, and then jumped, escaping unhurt.

Bang went the wagon, and then a crackling, tearing noise told that the cage was badly smashed.

Instinctively Hey Rube and Sol Fixer rushed toward the wreck, while Jim Swan, with his cruel steel hook, prodded the elephant severely in punishment for his unruly behavior.

"Darn your great carcass!" was all he said, but he repeated the observation a great many times, and each time he drove the steel hook savagely into the elephant's side. Jim Swan had been managing elephants for years, and he always held that kindness was thrown away upon them. He believed in the power of fear, rather than of love, in training the lower animals.

Meanwhile there was a continuous growling, momentarily getting louder in the interior of the wrecked cage, while the gaudily-painted sides of the wagon shook violently, and threatened every instant to give way.

"Cuss that tiger! He'll give us trouble afore we git this hyar wagon up ag'in. Wonder if

ther axle ain't broke," growled Fixer, as he tried to see the extent of the damage.

"Wal, now, you bet yer boots I'll straighten out that wagon afore you kin take a chaw o' terbacker. Watch me once."

The speaker was Munch Jones, and he had just got down from the driver's seat of the last wagon to give his advice and assistance wherever it might be needed.

He swaggered around the fallen wagon, with the brim of his soft, shapeless hat pulled very low over his eyes, and was about to give some valuable directions in the premises, when he stopped as if petrified, opening his eyes so wide with fright that they almost lifted off his hat.

"What's the matter, thar, Munch?" asked Sol Fixer, with a sneer.

But Munch could not reply. He was standing face to face with the Royal Bengal Tiger, who in the middle of the open space by the side of the cage from which he had escaped, was crouched just ready to spring.

CHAPTER VII.

WHAT SONDZ SAW IN THE MIRROR.

It was two o'clock, and as dark as it ever gets on a river.

The wind had risen, and blew the waters of the always swiftly-moving Detroit River into rolling hillocks, white-capped and angry.

At the lower end of Belle Isle, which, three miles above the heart of Detroit, divides the river and forms a station, as it were, between the United States and Canada, stood a man smoking a cigarette.

"Caramba! Why he not come?" he muttered. "Ze wind blow ma cigarrito, and spoil ma smoke, and I wait here one, two hours."

He walked impatiently up and down the sandy, low-lying shore, and tried to penetrate the thick darkness that overhung the river, broken here and there by the twinkling lights of barges, sailing-vessels, and steamers moored along the wharves on both sides of the broad stream.

Belle Isle, at that time, was not the hand some pleasure park that it is to-day. The city councils of Detroit had not appropriated money to beautify the island, and it was simply a sandy and wooded waste—a place for snakes and for boys and young men to go bathing in the summer with no apprehensions of police or other interference.

The island is about two miles long and a mile across at its widest part. It is densely wooded over most of its extent.

A house stood on the lower end, toward the city. In past summers it had been used as a refreshment saloon, where pop, lemonade, cakes and ice cream were served, and where the tired oarsman or bather could sit in the shade and enjoy the prospect.

Fishing tackle, bait and other requirements of the angler could also be obtained here, and a crazy wooden landing ran out into the water a little distance, so that skiffs could be brought to shore without running aground in the sand. A large swing, on which many generations of Detroiters had disported themselves, was erected near the landing, and it was seldom idle on a bright afternoon.

As Fernando Sondaz strolled about on the sandy beach, occasionally kicking his feet loose from the tangled weeds that impeded his progress, his choler arose with each minute of delay.

"Caramba! I'll make it so hot for him when he come. Ze wind! How it make me cold!"

Over his tightly-buttoned Prince Albert, the Mexican wore a light-weight spring overcoat, which fluttered and flapped and caused its short-tempered owner almost unbearable annoyance.

With a shudder he drew the overcoat around him and buttoned it.

"Caramba! It vill rain, too, before long. Then what s'all I do?"

He strained his eyes for a few moments longer, but could not distinguish any boat coming up the river, as he hoped to do. Nothing but the heaving ripples, that had now become good-sized waves, which were getting larger and angrier every instant.

"It vill be a tough night, eh? Vell all ze better. Ve vill not be disturbed! It ees good. Eef zat fool would only come!"

He listened intently.

"Caramba! Fernando, you vas nervous, eh? It vas nothing!"

If it had been light, the face of the Mexican could have been seen to turn pale, or rather, green, that is, if there had been anybody there to see it. He thought for the moment he heard a human voice.

But, listen as he would, nothing could he make out now save the moaning of the wind through the trees and the lap-lapping of the waters against the old wooden piles and landing at his feet.

It was not a pleasant situation for a nervous man, and when the Mexican turned around with a fresh cigarette, to shelter it from the wind of the river while he lighted it in that peculiar single-handed way of his, he started violently and uttered his favorite expletive, "Caramba!"

with a jerky intonation as if some one had struck him suddenly from behind.

Over his head he saw something that he could have sworn for the minute was the form of a man swinging in an old-fashioned gibbet, such as were used for pirates and sheep-thieves in the New England States during the last century.

Recovering himself, he twirled his cigarette in his fingers, and lighting it, puffed a cloud of smoke in the direction of the supposed gibbet.

"Caramba! I big fool as Feexer himself. So!" he muttered, with a grin. "Zat old swing looked like gallows, and almost scared ze life out of me. Ah! Take mooch more fun for Fernando Sondaz before he haf anything to do with ze hangman. Eh?"

Nevertheless, the Mexican could not be quite easy in his mind until he had examined the swing as closely as possible in the dark.

He tried to shake the uprights—two stout poles that had long years ago towered as forest monarchs among millions of lesser trees. They were almost immovable, and he could hardly make them even tremble.

"Put there to stay, eh?"

He found that the rope of the swing, which had been put up the year before, was still hanging from the cross-piece twenty feet over his head, and, by an unaccountable impulse, he felt constrained to gravely set himself on the wooden board which formed the seat of the swing, and work himself gently to and fro.

The wind, still rising, whistled in his ears, and perhaps suggested all kinds of devilish schemes to his secret soul. Who knows?

The cigarette burning brightly, as he smoked industriously, occasionally lit up his evil countenance, making the whites of his eyes lurid, and bringing into sharp relief the clear features and jet-black mustache.

Had any one accidentally seen him, seated there in the wild night, smoking and thinking, he would have thought that he had suddenly come upon Mephistopheles, in nineteenth century costume, hatching some plan for the overthrow of innocence amid congenial surroundings.

For perhaps ten minutes Sondaz sat there. Then he got up, and, going upon the wooden landing, looked earnestly down the river.

"He not here yet, eh? Well!"

He turned away in disgust, and walked toward the house.

It was quite empty. No one had lived in it for a year, and most of the furniture that was of any value had been removed.

A door guarded the entrance to an outer apartment, used as a summer kitchen, from which access could be obtained to the main building.

This door was unfastened, and Sondaz pushed it open and went inside.

"Must not make light—no!" he muttered. "Some people might think there were ghosts here, eh? But not the police. No, no!"

He shook his head and chuckled. He evidently was not quite a stranger to the habits and nature of the police authorities.

He shivered as he stepped into the summer kitchen. It was damp and cheerless, and seemed to possess a chilliness all its own.

"Try smoke. Always feel ze comfortable when I haf cigarrito."

He felt in his pockets for his cigarette-paper and tobacco, and in the darkness rolled a cigarette more neatly than many people could have done with all the advantages of light and comfort. Once puffing at a cigarette, and he was again the cool, insolent scoundrel that the reader has already seen him to be naturally.

He evidently knew the lay of the house pretty well, for he walked across the kitchen unhesitatingly in the darkness, and put his fingers on the handle of a door at the extreme end.

He turned the handle, but the door remained firm.

"Ah, yees! Ma brain ees weak, eh?" he muttered, as if having a little joke at his own expense.

Fumbling in his pocket he drew forth a key, which he placed in the lock, and with considerable creaking, turned so that the door opened.

"You haf mooch fun, Fernando, in your quiet way, eh?" he chuckled.

The room he was in now had evidently been used as the principal apartment, where the refreshments were dispensed, and where guests had often spent an hour or two when hot and tired, in drinking lemonade and pop and disposing of ice-cream. Two of the little round tables, too rickety to have been worth taking away, and four or five dilapidated chairs, yet remained in the room, perhaps in the position in which they had been left by the last party of pleasure-seekers that had used them.

Fernando, who seemed, like other wild beasts, to possess the faculty of seeing to some extent in the dark, did not fall over them, as most men would have done, but passed around them, in his progress toward the other end of the large room.

Three windows in the wall on his right commanded the river, and enabled both the American and Canadian shores, to be seen for several miles below Detroit, almost to Wyandotte and Grosse Isle.

Fernando stepped to the middle window and

looked through a broken pane down the river. The wind blew through the hole and scattered the ashes of his cigarette, but not a sign could be distinguished of anybody coming toward the little landing-place where Sol Fixer was to have arrived at two o'clock. It was now nearly half-past, and the Mexican was getting very impatient.

"Caramba! It is light at four, and ze police or some of ze fisherman might see us, eh? I know not what come of Feexer," he growled.

The window from which he looked was open to the inspection of any one from the outside, but the other two were closely shuttered.

"Vell, I go look at ma beauties. Eef he not come, he not geet his share. So!"

Opposite the windows was a long counter, some four feet from the wall. Behind it were shelves, and under it several cupboards, where, in the business days of the house, pies and cakes had been kept from the air and dust.

Sondaz went behind the counter and stooped down, feeling for something, which, judging by his whispered expression of satisfaction, he found at last.

It was a small brass knob, the only one remaining of several that had been there originally, and it formed a handle for opening one of the cupboard doors under the counter.

"Good!" muttered the Mexican, as he pulled away at his cigarette and allowed a thin stream to pour forth from his long, straight nose.

He pulled open the cupboard door and felt inside until, in one corner, his fingers came in contact with a small iron ring let into the floor.

"Zat ees all right, but I tak' off ma coat, eh? It ees too hot here. So!"

He stood up and removed his overcoat, with his face to the wall, and mechanically tried to distinguish his own features in a looking-glass that hung from one of the shelves, having been left inadvertently by the last occupants of the house.

"You handsome fellow, Sondaz," he chuckled, "but your face not light up mirror in ze dark, eh?"

He stooped again and reached into the cupboard for the iron ring. Slipping his fingers into it, he pulled hard and raised a trap that had been ingeniously made right inside the cupboard, and so neatly that it was not likely to be discovered unless directions for finding it had been previously given.

A short flight of steps led to a cellar, not very large, that had been strongly walled around with stone, to keep the shifting quicksand from breaking through and weakening the foundations.

A few kegs that may have contained beer at some time, with old cracker-boxes and remnants of hambones, etc., were scattered about the cellar, while a strong smell of cheese and the noise of scampering when the trap was raised indicated that rats or mice, or both, were in the habit of holding high revel in this lonely underground apartment.

Without hesitation Sondaz stepped down the stairs in the dark, and feeling his way to a corner, reached behind a barrel and brought forth a small bag in which something rattled musically as he hugged it to his bosom.

"Ma beauties! All safe, eh?" he muttered. "Let me look at you for von meenute. Then I go to look for Feexer again."

He ascended the steps, and coming out of the little cupboard, stood up behind the counter with the bag in his arms.

"Ah! Ma beauties; never lose you again, eh? Some for Feexer, but only a few—only a few. Caramba! Why should I geeve him any? It ees robbery. But I suppose he talk eef I geeve him ze sleep, an' then—"

The Mexican shrugged his shoulders in completion of his reverie, and sought consolation in plunging his hand into the bag.

He drew forth a brooch, and held it up, so that a faint ray of light, hardly distinguishable, that entered into the middle window, showed a sparkle in the bauble.

"Ah! Zis is ze turquoise and diamonds she got in Paris from ze Comte de Lussan. He vas a fool! He thought she so clevere zat he gif jewels vithout even knowing her at all. Admiration of her art, he said in ze note. Vell, I admire ze art too—ze jeweler's art vhat made zis beautiful pin. I wear it in ma shirt-bosom and pay ma compliments to ze Mademoiselle Rosa. So!"

With a grin he held the pin for an instant against his shirt, and then shrugging his shoulders, shook the bag again, as if he liked to hear the rattle of the contents.

"Zere moost be feefty thousand dollars' worth in zees bag. Now, let me see. I gif half to Feexer, zat leave me \$25,000. Um! Zen I sell some to zat thieving Jew, and he gif me, of course, \$10,000, and say he robbing himself. Caramba!"

Still toying with the turquoise and diamond brooch, he lapsed into thought again, and his face assumed the dark expression peculiar to it when he became preoccupied.

"Caramba! Sol Feexer, eef you did not know too much about me, and eef you could not be useful to me, I would never geef these beautiful things to you. It ees waste. And thees tur-

quoise. Eet is rare, eet is superb! No, I vill keep it myself, and divide the rest. He vill neyare know!"

As he spoke, he again put the brooch against his shirt-bosom, and turning around as if he would look in the mirror to note the effect, suddenly started back with a smothered cry of horror.

His left hand involuntarily closed upon the bag of jewelry, while his right, still holding the turquoise brooch against his shirt, seemed to be frozen there.

"Vhat ees zat?" he whispered, almost inaudibly, through his nearly paralyzed lips.

His eyes were fixed upon the little mirror with a glassy stare, and his whole appearance was that of supernatural fear.

A light shone full upon the surface of the mirror—a light for which the Mexican could not possibly account—while, *from the depths of the glass a face looked out, the gleaming eyes transfixing his own, as if he were in the thrall of a rattlesnake!*

CHAPTER VIII.

A MYSTERIOUS INTERRUPTION.

FOR nearly a minute the Mexican involuntarily returned the gaze of this mysterious visitant who had come from he knew not whither.

He could not have moved an inch from the spot to grasp a fortune or avoid a thunderbolt, while those terrible eyes were looking into his and apparently reading his very soul.

Suddenly the face disappeared, the light fading out at the same instant.

The Mexican for a few seconds could hardly realize that the face had gone out of his sight. He found himself straining his eyes in the darkness to try and distinguish his ghostly visitor in the mirror, but nothing could he see but black darkness.

At last, with a long breath, he recovered himself to some extent, and delivered himself of a deep-drawn "*Caramba!*"

He clutched the bag tighter, and slipping the turquoise brooch into his pocket, snarled at the glass and pressing his face close to it in impotent wrath, hissed:

"So! You think I am afraid of devils and ghosts. Bah! You not know Fernando Sondaz. Vhat I care whose face eet ees! I keep ma-self wiz zis. So!"

He drew forth his dirk-knife from his sleeve as he spoke, and flourished it with his usual air of bravado. But if it had been light, and any one had been there to see, a furtive glance around could have been detected in his manner, and spite of his big words and assumption of careless bravery, Sondaz was frightened, and, try as he would, he could not wholly shake off an unpleasant feeling of impending misfortune.

"Bah! Zere ees nothing in ze glass. I fancied it. Zat all. I vill try smoke! It make me feel all right. So!"

He hastily crawled into the cupboard and down the secret staircase, depositing the bag of jewels in their former hiding-place behind the barrel. Then he came up, fastening the trap and cupboard doors behind him.

With his eyes glancing in all directions in the thick gloom, he made his way to the middle window and looked out.

He could just distinguish the tall swing, with its waving ropes and tall uprights, which had given him such a fright shortly before. Beyond was the crazy wooden boat landing, with the now angry waters beating against the slimy posts upon which it was supported, and washing over the platform itself.

"*Caramba!* Zis ees a wild night. Good!" muttered the Mexican.

Looking down the river he could see the white caps of the turbulent waves chasing each other and tumbling about in rare enjoyment of the fast-rising storm, while the wind, which had contented itself with whistling, in a rather obstreperous manner, heretofore, was now roaring fiercely in a way that indicated a more than ordinarily severe tempest.

The Detroit River, situated as it is, in the chain of great lakes, has a habit of working itself up into a passion such as is quite beyond the conception of other more peaceable streams.

Sondaz stood at the window thinking about what he should do, and mechanically rolling a cigarette.

"No; I better not. Ma cigarette would geef me avay eef I smoke. I not know whose face eet vas, and—perhaps—it vas not ma fancy. No! *Caramba!* I like smoke, but I better not. So!"

He threw his cigarette impatiently upon the floor and stamped it out of existence, while still looking down the river.

"Ah! Vat ees zat? So! He is coming, at last. Nearly three o'clock, eh? Vell, so long as he come now, I not care."

Buttoning his overcoat around him tightly, and bestowing a tap on the top of his hat to make it fit securely, he made his way out of the house in the same way that he came in.

The wind blew with much greater ferocity than when he had been outside before, and it almost took away his breath as he fought his way down to the shore.

The great swing was rocking to and fro now,

and there was a general activity about everything such as is always noted in a high wind, and which has such an awe-inspiring effect in a lonely place in the dead of night.

The Mexican reached the landing, and walking out to the extreme edge, tried to make out the boat that he had distinguished for an instant from the window.

For some time all he could make out was the rough mass of water, rising and falling irregularly, and bewildering him, as far as his eye could reach. Sometimes the waves arose high enough to obscure the lights of Detroit far away on the right—all save the electric lights on the high masts that are scattered all over the city, and that always remained in view, no matter how high the waves sprung. On the left a few straggling lamps marked the position of Windsor, the small Canadian town opposite Detroit, but they were oftener than not hidden from Sondaz by the water.

"*Caramba!* I saw a boat with some one seeting in it, I am sure!"

He looked still more intently and then tossed his head slightly in satisfaction.

"Yes, here he ees. He will be here in ten or feefteen meenutes. I vill take smoke. I not care now who sees me."

Stepping back to the swing, and giving one of the uprights a playful slap as he remembered how it had startled him half an hour before, he rolled his cigarette and lighted it without trouble, in spite of the wind that would have rendered such a feat impossible to most men.

Then he seated himself on the little board and swung gently to and fro in the enjoyment of his smoke while waiting for the boat to get to the landing.

Ten minutes thus passed, and he began to feel chilly, in spite of his overcoat when he distinguished a voice—that of Fixer.

"Holloa thar! Why in thunder don't yer come out hyar an' help. D'ye hear, yer durned lubberly cuss? Hallo—o—o—o—o—o!"

"Ah! He having trouble," commented the Mexican, unconcernedly, as he daintily twirled the paper of his cigarette where the moisture of his mouth had made it a little ragged. "Vell, it not ma beezness. I not a reever pilot, eh?"

"Say, you senor! Are yer thar? Ef yer are, come out hyar and ketch this hyar rope. Cuss yer ugly picter. Durned ef I don't believe you are the ornaryist cuss ez ever I see'd!"

"Yes, Feexer eez having trouble!" was the nonchalant remark of Sondaz, as he puffed away at his cigarette, without evincing the slightest intention of moving.

He saw that Fixer was in a small skiff, rowing with all his strength toward the island, but that he was a hundred yards or so away, and was not making any appreciable headway.

"Ze current ees strong there. If Feexer was a sailor he know that eh? Vell, it not my beezness. I make one more cigarrito, light it and smoke it. Then I help Feexer. He keep me waiting. Now I doze same to him. So!"

This small spirit of revenge, characteristic of Fernando Sondaz, was now humored to the fullest extent. He actually did as he said. He deliberately rolled another cigarette, and smoked it with a great air of enjoyment, while Fixer a short distance below the island, tugged away at his oars in the rough water, shipped waves, got wet, tired, hot and disgusted, and poured forth invectives upon the Mexican that were enough to have stirred up any one but the cool rascal who sat smoking on the swing.

At last Fernando Sondaz threw down his cigarette, stamped out the remaining light in it, and marched down to the landing.

He had hitherto been unseen by Sol who had been bawling at him on speculation. He did not suppose that the Mexican was within hearing, not having, in the course of his acquaintance with that gentleman, been made aware of the amiable trait in his character that induced him to wantonly cause trouble to a partner in revenge for a fancied injury.

When Sondaz stepped upon the landing now, however, Fixer discerned him at once, and cried out, louder than ever:

"Say, senor, what in thunderation am I ter do with this hyar boat? I can't make that landing, nobow. I've been out hyar fer nearly an hour tryin' ter git ashore."

"Nearly an hour, eh? Zat ees too bad," answered the Mexican, mildly. "Zen you vas here at two o'clock, ze time we said, eh?"

Sol hesitated for a moment.

"Wal, nearly an hour, I said. It wasn't what you might call exactly two o'clock. I hed things what kep' me back down thar at ther circus. But I'll tell yer all about it when I git ashore."

Fixer said all this in breathless tones, for he was obliged to keep at work with the oars to maintain the position he had already, with much labor, attained.

Turn half around an' row ze boat to port. So! Pull hard on starboard oar. Zat's right. Now, steady! Pull both! Port! Port! Zat's ze way!"

A few more directions from the Mexican, who seemed to know the currents perfectly, and Sol Fixer, puffing and fatigued, brought the nose of the skiff to the landing, where it was

seized in an iron grip by Sondaz, while the other got out.

"So, Feexer! It was hard pulling, eh?"

"Hard ain't no word fer it."

"Ah! It vas easy eef you know ze river. Zere is very strong current from end of the island, an' eef you geet in it, you haf no chance to land. But if you pull around to port side—nearest to ze American shore—you make it easily. You remember zat, eh?"

"You bet I'll remember it."

"Good. Vell, ve pull up ze boat on ze shore. Eet is bad night—or rather, ze morning, eh? We want ze boat again, perhaps."

The boat was quickly pulled up as the Mexican suggested, and then the two men walked toward the house. The Mexican opened it the same way as before, and both went into the principal room.

"Can't yer git er light in this hyar darned place? I don't like ter be tumbling over chairs an' things. Besides, ter tell yer ther truth, Sondaz, I like ter be able ter see yer face when I'm a-doin' any business with yer," said Fixer, bluntly.

"Zere is ze vinder there," announced Sondaz, with a shrug, pointing to the unshuttered casement referred to several times already.

"Wal, what of it? Thar ain't no one else but ourselves on ther island, is thar?"

"I suppose not, eh?"

"An' yer don't think any one is er goin' ter take a pleasure ride on ther river on er mornin' like this hyar, do yer?"

"No."

"Wal, then, let's have er light, like—like—Christians, an' do up our business in er nice, respectable way," blustered Fixer, wiping the water he had gathered on his tempestuous voyage from his black beard with the corner of his blue silk handkerchief.

"I take you in another room, at ze back. I like to be sure zat we not be overlooked. I not care eef there ees no one here. Eet is better to be quite safe, eh? You not think so?"

"Just ez you say. I don't care, ez long as we have a light. One room is ez good ter me ez another. I suppose you have ther whole house," carelessly replied Sol, with a quiet grin that it was too dark for his companion to see.

"Yees. I pay big rent for zis house. Eet ees ma country residence. So!" returned the Mexican, as seriously as if he was telling the unvarnished truth.

Into another room, dark as a grave, the Mexican ushered his companion, who heard the door shut with a bang, and a key turn noisily.

Then the Mexican lighted a match, and taking from the inside pocket of his overcoat a small portable lamp, which, in its leather case, was made to lie snugly in a very small space, touched the wick, and at once had plenty of illumination.

The room was not very large, and the only furniture was an old kitchen table, hacked with initials and other designs by past patrons of the house, and not worth carrying away when the proprietor moved.

Sondaz put the light on the table, and faced Sol Fixer with an inquiring look.

"Vell?"

"Wal?"

Each put this monosyllable in the form of a query, though their pronunciation of it was so unlike that it might almost have been a different word.

"You know what I want, eh?" observed Sondaz, shrugging his shoulders and waving the little finger of his right hand in that peculiar manner only possible to a person with Spanish blood in his veins.

"Yes; an' I'm ready to do it ef you'll whack up with me right hyar," replied Sol.

"I vill—what you call—vack oop—certainly. Zat ez what I brought you here for, eh?"

"All right. Whar's ther stuff?"

"It ees all safe. But—Mademoiselle Rosa?"

"Oh, I have her scared. Don't you worry about her."

"Ah!"

"She knows ez she's your wife. Wasn't she married ter yer, down in Vera Cruz, and didn't I witness ther ceremony, eh?"

The two beauties grinned at each other across the table, and Sondaz carelessly rolled another cigarette.

"Yees, you witnessed ze ceremonie. Vell?"

"Ther feller ez played ther parson wuzer dandy, now, I'm tellin' yer. I've got him, too, ef I want him. It vas too bad ez you got pulled fer that little cuttin' scrape just at that time. But you wuz allers er little too handy with ther dirk."

"*Caramba!*" growled the other, as his white teeth gripped his cigarette savagely.

"Yes, an' they lugged yer right out in that little adobe house whar ther ceremony hed just gone off so nice and neat, so that yer didn't have time even to address ther bride ez Madame Sondaz. Too bad, wuzn't it?"

Sol Fixer grinned maliciously, and the Mexican bit his cigarette in two and threw the pieces on the floor in disgust.

"And now, vhat, Fixer?" he hissed.

"Wal, she thought you wuz dead."

"Yees?"

"Now she knows ez you're not, an' that you are likely to claim her."

"Caramba! Yes."

"She has a neat little fortune right hyar in Detroit that hez jist come ter light. Wal, you establish yer claim, and—"

"Too dangerous," commented the Mexican, with a dark frown.

"Perhaps. But you can scare her into buying you off."

"How much can I geet?"

"Two hundred thousand dollars."

"And your commession—how mooch?"

"A hundred thousand," answered Sol, coolly.

"A hundred thousand—you're craze! Caramba!"

"You heerd what I said."

"But—it ees ze robbery! It ees—"

"Then the deal's off, eh? Well, whack up the shiners yer took from Rosa, an' I'll be gittin' back ter ther city. I guess I'll keep with ther circus."

The Mexican looked straight into the eyes of the burly villain facing him. He saw nothing but determined defiance there.

What would have been the result of the controversy can hardly be known, for at this moment a heavy weight of some kind dropped from above them, and smashing the lamp, covered both men with plaster and other rubbish from the ceiling, while a hollow voice that came from they knew not where, exclaimed:

"You scoundrels!"

CHAPTER IX.

A HUNT IN THE DARK.

WHEN the royal Bengal tiger got a full view of Munch Jones, his tail waved from side to side with a little quicker motion, and he was evidently getting ready for a spring that would result in the annihilation of the gentleman who had just expressed his indifference to wild beasts in general and tigers in particular.

It was an awful moment!

Fixer was behind the last wagon, and Jim Swan was so busy with his elephant that he did not notice the situation of Munch.

Rube Rocket only suspected something wrong. With one spring he was at the side of Munch Jones, whose courage, such as it was, had all evaporated.

There was no time to lose.

Rube still held the toe-stake that he had used in the fight, and he grasped it firmly as he made up his mind what to do.

The tiger, though just about to leap upon Munch, wavered now that he had another foe to meet. There is a vast amount of reasoning power in animals, and there is no doubt that the tiger was thinking, in his way, what to do under the new combination of circumstances.

The detective took advantage of this momentary hesitation, and, taking true aim, sent the toe-stake flying full in the tiger's face.

The heavy missile of hard wood twirled rapidly in the air, and then one end of it struck the tiger full in the left eye.

With a roar of pain the great beast turned around, and ambled at a fast trot across the field toward the grove. In another instant, it was lost in the darkness.

"Hurry, boys!" cried the detective. "A rope—quick! It won't do to let him go running about the city. He'll kill somebody, sure, for he's in an ugly mood."

"Well, now, I don't think as he'll kill anybody, not while Munch Jones is around," exclaimed that individual, who, now that he was out of danger, had resumed his swagger, and wore the front of his soft felt hat lower than ever over his forehead.

"Well, run down the grove and head him back, Munch," suggested the detective, with a smile.

"Give me a gun an' I'll do it in a minute," returned Munch.

"Oh, chase yourself away, Munch. What are you talking about? You don't want to kill that tiger. He's worth ten thousand dollars. You talk like a fool!" put in Bud, as having left his precious big drum in Alice Trevilyan's care, he walked forward to the spot.

"You're right, Bud. Get a rope, Munch, a lasso."

Munch swaggered toward the rear of the last wagon, where, underneath was hanging a quantity of tackle, such as ropes, chains, iron bars, etc., that might be needed in such cases as the present and returned with a long, closely-woven lariat, with a slip-knot, which he handed to Rube.

"Let me have one of those irons, too," said the detective.

Munch handed him a bar, giving another to Bud, and retaining a third for himself.

"Can you throw a rope, Munch?" asked Rube.

"Can I? Well—"

Munch was about to say that he was perfectly at home in such work, having been a cowboy for ten years, when a snicker from Bud made him change his mind, and he admitted, reluctantly that he didn't think he would be much good in roping tigers.

"But, will you help?" asked the detective.

Bud looked around at Alice to see that she was keeping her hand on his drum, as he had directed, and then answered, modestly:

"I'll help you, Rube, of course, 'cause I think a bloke ought to do all he can to help his mates, but I don't know whether I'll do it very well."

"You'll try, though, eh?"

"Most sart'ly I'll try."

Without any more waste of words, Budworth Buddicombe went to the wagon, and dragged out another rope like that in the hands of Rube Rocket.

The ropes slipped easily through the knots, they being thoroughly soaped with that object, and Rube pronounced the equipments in excellent condition for the work to be done.

The driver of the first wagon had gone on, and knew nothing about the accident that had happened behind him. Jim Swan had been busy with his elephants. He knew that his services would be required in recapturing the tiger, and he was getting ready for the fray in his quiet way.

The stakes to which the elephants had been chained were still firm in the ground. Back to these stakes Swan took his immense charges, and, with a few dexterous twists had their feet chained and secured beyond the likelihood of undoing.

Then he gave the second elephant—the one that had caused all the trouble—several severe jabs with the elephant hook, as a punishment for his skittishness, and walked quietly toward the rest of the party.

Hey Rube looked at him and saw that he meant business, but did not say anything. He was quite content to have Jim Swan's assistance without forcing the old man to talk against his will.

Swan saw that the detective and Bud were each provided with a lariat and an iron bar. He poked about under the wrecked wagon, and triumphantly drew forth a rope and bar for himself. Then he took a lantern from the fence, held it in his hand a minute, hesitating and—put it back.

"Don't want lanterns," he muttered. "Stand a better chance without them. Now, Rube, ready?"

"Yes."

"Let's git, then."

The four men marched over the field, keeping a sharp lookout for the tiger.

"Probably gone down the road," suggested Bud.

"Well, I guess not," said Munch who liked to differ with most people, especially with Bud.

"What do you think, Jim?" asked the detective.

"Don't know," was Swan's sententious reply.

"Vell, you bet yer I'd have some opinion, now," muttered Munch. "If I didn't know I'd say I did."

It was very dark, and a strong wind was blowing, making it difficult for the men to hear each other's voices even when they did speak, which was not often.

They reached the spot by the side of the road where the bank was worn away, and which Hey Rube had defended so valiantly half an hour before.

"He's probably in among those trees or down in the hollow here," said Bud, as he looked carefully around. "It's a blooming shame that he don't keep out in the open, so as a fellow can get a good cast at him with a rope."

"Oh, give us a rest, Bud; you make me tired," growled Munch, in a tone of deep disgust, as he pushed his hat a little further forward.

Jim Swan did not say anything, but he was looking with his keen eyes, in all directions, and listening, too. The wind was making so much noise that there was not much hope of hearing anything else.

Suddenly he put his hand on Hey Rube's arm and whispered excitedly:

"There he is!"

"Where?"

"Jist the other side o' that poplar, I see his eyes a minute ago."

"Right. I see them."

"Keep quiet now. The best thing is to get across the road and try a cast from behind the trees."

"Well?"

"You throw the first."

"Yes."

"I'll put in the second, and Bud the third."

"Well?"

"As soon as any of yer throw why just wind the slack of yer rope around a tree, quick afore he has time to know what's up, for tigers are mighty cunning critters, I tell yer. The trees are big around hyar, and the ropes are stout enough too. If we can git the three ropes around him, and git 'em pulled taut around the trees in different directions we've got him."

"And what am I ter do, Jim? Ain't I to do nothin' at all?" put in Munch, in aggrieved tones.

"Yes. If the ropes runs, and he runs, you just step up and crash him over the head with your iron bars and we'll yank him into the cage afore he comes to," replied Swan, carelessly.

Munch Jones did not know exactly whether

the veteran was making fun of him or not, so he wisely held his tongue, and awaited developments.

Meanwhile the two fiery balls, that all knew to be the eyes of the monarch of the jungle, had come into greater prominence, as if their owner had crawled forward to see what his enemies were about to do.

The tiger was a noble beast, who had been in captivity only about a year. Though full-grown, he was very young, and as savage as the day that he was taken prisoner amid the giant grass of his native Hindostan.

This was the first time he had tasted the sweets of liberty since his capture, and he was not disposed to give himself up again without a struggle.

Carefully the four men let themselves down the bank into the road, and up the other side.

Each, except Munch, held their lassoes loosely coiled in the left hand, with the loop hanging so that it could be quickly taken in the right and sent spinning over the head of the tiger. The iron bar was in the right hand, but the purpose was to drop it at the moment that the throw was made, picking it up immediately for use in case it was necessary to come to close quarters.

Hey Rube took up his position behind a large poplar on the very edge of the bank, and waited while his companions obtained cover.

"I'll whistle when you are to throw, Rube," whispered Jim Swan as he passed.

"All right."

In another moment the signal, a long, low whistle, that might have been the cry of an owl, sounded above the souging of the wind.

Rube could just make out the tiger, not a dozen yards away, standing perfectly motionless, with his head toward the other side of the road. He had evidently been a little bewildered by the flank movement of his pursuers, and had not yet made up his mind where they had gone.

As the whistle sounded through the trees, his tail began its ominous waving to and fro, and Rube knew that the moment for action had arrived.

He rested his iron bar against the trunk of the poplar, gathered up the loop of his lariat, saw that it would swing freely with plenty of slack to spare, and then, with all his force, sent the loop flying toward the tiger.

The cast was a splendid one. It hovered above the head of the beast for a few seconds, like the flight of a swallow, and then settling down, encircled his neck and shoulders.

Instantly the detective pulled the rope tight, and twisted the end a dozen times around the tree.

He was still doing so, when another rope came flying from a tree on the other side of the tiger, catching him also around the neck, and holding him tightly in the opposite direction.

The tiger was so surprised that he did not move, and even his tail stopped its oscillation.

A third rope from behind him spun through the air, but did not reach his neck. It was not a failure entirely, however, for by the merest chance it caught him by the tail, holding it as firmly as the other two ropes did his neck.

"Now, boys, forward!" sung out the voice of Jim Swan.

Hey Rube, Bud, Munch and Swan all ran toward the tiger with their iron bars uplifted.

But there was no occasion for the weapons to be used. The tiger was completely cowed. He turned his head from side to side, but showed no disposition to be troublesome.

"I guess I'll give him one anyhow, just for luck, d'ye see," observed Munch, as he raised his bar with a flourish.

"Well, I guess you'd better not!" interposed Jim Swan.

"Tigers has their rights, jist ther same as human beings, an' I don't propose to let anybody hurt no tigers as I'm connected with. Now, you hear me?"

Jim Swan was not the man to be trifled with, and Munch Jones knew it.

"Oh, all right, cully. Yer don't need ter git yer mad up. I don't want ter touch yer tiger if he's a friend o' yours."

"He is a friend of mine, as far as that goes," was Swan's significant response.

"Say, Jim. I believe I'll go West an' be a cowboy. Wasn't that a good way, to catch him by the blooming tail? I shouldn't ha' thought a bloke could do that, don't you know," remarked Bud, with an air of modest pride, that showed he was the gentleman who had surprised the tiger by taking liberties with his caudal appendage.

"Ther best cast I ever saw," agreed Jim, with a smile.

"Rube," whispered a voice in the detective's ear.

He turned quickly and saw Alice Trevilyan at his elbow.

"Well?"

"He's gone!"

"Who? Sol?"

"Yes."

"Where's he gone?"

"I don't know. As soon as you came down here after the tiger I saw him sneak out of the

gate and go down Grand River avenue as fast as he could walk. I think he's gone to—"

"Hush!" interposed the detective, putting his hand to her mouth. Then he added, to Jim: "I suppose you can get this tiger in without me now, can't you? He don't seem likely to give you any more trouble, eh?"

"Oh, no, he's all right now. I could handle him alone now, but with such a first-class man as Jones hyar, why, it will be just pie getting him into his cage. Much obliged to you for yer help, Rube!" returned Jim Swan heartily.

Munch thrust out his chin and jerked his head sideways to express his contempt for the sneer of the veteran, and Rube, with a laugh, touched Alice on the shoulder as a sign to her to follow, and walked swiftly toward the gate leading to Grand River avenue.

Tim was dutifully unwinding Budworth Bud-diccombe's big drum, and fuming within himself at not being permitted to join the tiger hunt. But he had promised his sister Alice to remain where he was, and it was not often that he broke his word to her.

The two elephants, the broken-down cage, and the third wagon all remained just as they had been left.

"Tim, you go down to the train as soon as things are ready, and go to bed. Alice and I will be down there some time, I expect. But we have business to attend to that must be settled up before we leave to-night," whispered Rube.

"All right," returned the boy. "I supposed there would be something for you to attend to as soon as I saw Senor—"

"Never mind about his name, Tim," interrupted the detective. "But you have guessed rightly. Now, listen, and be sure not to breathe a hint of this to any one."

"Trust me."

"I do trust you, Tim," answered the detective, in a hearty tone. "If you do not see or hear from me by eight o'clock this evening, telegraph to Police Headquarters to look for me at Belle Isle."

"I understand."

"Good. I'll take care of Alice."

A moment later Tim was alone, save for the elephants and the pair of leopards that were growling disconsolately in the closed-up wagon.

CHAPTER X.

THE COMPACT.

WHEN the sudden interruption to the conference between Sondaz and Sol Fixer took place, the two men were for the moment completely nonplused.

Only for a moment, however.

Sondaz rushed to the door through which they had entered, and turning the key, tried to open it. To his dismay, he found that it had been bolted on the outside.

"Caramba!" he hissed, as he went to another door, opposite, and found that that, also, was secured on the other side.

He looked up, but in the pitchy darkness could not distinguish anything. He could hear foot-steps overhead, however, walking about in a low, sloping-ceilinged garret that he knew existed, but that he had not troubled himself to examine.

"What's all ther trouble, Sondaz? I thought ez we wuz alone," whispered Sol. "Is thar goin' ter be some fightin' hyar, after all? Yer know it ain't quite ez safe to rub er fellow out hyar ez it is in Leadville or Arizona."

"Caramba! What does zis mean?" hissed the Mexican, as he fumbled in his pocket for a match.

He found one—all he had—and lighted it. He saw that there was a great hole in the ceiling by the side of an open trap, at which doubtless some one had been listening to all their conversation. An inadvertent step upon the plaster had broken it through and caused the accidental discovery of the eavesdropper.

He found his lamp under the rubbish upon the table, and managed to light it before the match had quite burned out.

"Dunno whether it is wise ter light thet thing jist now, Sondaz. We'd make er good mark to anybody up in thet thar hole," observed Fixer, doubtfully.

"Bah! There's nobody there. You heard them walk away, eh?"

"Thet's so. Guess you're right, Sondaz."

"Gif me lift up, an' I soon see. Car-r-amba! I soon see!" came gratefully from between the Mexican's set teeth.

"Goin' up through the hole, eh?"

"Yees."

"All right. Everything goes," acquiesced Sol.

It was a peculiarity of these two parties in wickedness that each enjoyed the discomfiture of the other as much as if a common enemy. Just now Sol Fixer considered that their present difficulty reflected upon the sagacity of the Mexican, and he lost sight of his own possible danger in his satisfaction over the disgust of Fernando Sondaz.

Sol mounted the table, and with a slight exercise of his immense strength, lifted Sondaz through the trap.

A slight scuffling overhead as the Mexican walked over the broken flooring of the garret,

and then a pause of a few minutes. At the end of that time the swarthy face of Sondaz appeared at the opening, and with an eagerness unusual with him, he whispered:

"Sol!"

"Yes."

"Come up here."

"How?"

"I show you. Take zis."

As the Mexican spoke he let down a short, light ladder, that, resting on the table, made an easy means of ascent for his companion.

"Tread lightly and softly, so," directed the Mexican, as he took from the hand of the other the little lamp that he had brought with him.

"What does all this hyar mean, Sondaz?"

"Vait. You vill see."

Carefully the two men crawled along the flooring of the garret. The boards were torn up in many places, showing the rough plaster, and occasionally a black hole, which they knew was the apartment below.

The garret extended over the whole house, which was a long, rambling structure all on the ground floor save for the garret, and contained perhaps a dozen rooms, large and small.

"Zis is so loocky as never vas," whispered Sondaz.

"What?"

"Vait a meenute."

Putting his finger to his lip to enjoin the strictest silence, the Mexican led his companion along until they came to a part of the garret where rays of light streamed up through chinks at their feet.

"Now, look!" hissed the Mexican. "Stoop down and put your eye to zis leetle hole. Sol!"

Fixer did as he was directed, and an oath trembled on his lips that was with difficulty restrained, as he gazed upon the scene below.

"What is the meaning uv thet thar?" he croaked.

"It means that zis ees the time to act," answered the Mexican, with a poor attempt at his usual nonchalance.

What was it that caused such excitement in the bosoms of the two ruffians?

In the room which they saw through the chink, and which was connected with that they had just left by a small hall, secured by a door at each end, was a young girl, wrapped in a long waterproof cloak that covered her from head to foot, the hood of the cloak being drawn over her chestnut brown hair, that dropped in little ringlets over her white forehead, and made her pretty face look prettier than ever in her plain garment that was made for use rather than for ornament.

She was standing close to the door leading to the small hall, her head pressed to the panel, and her whole attitude showing that she was listening intently.

It was Mlle. Rosa, the circus-rider.

"What is she doing hyar, Sondaz?"

"How should I know?"

"Didn't yer know she wuz prowling around on the island?"

"No."

But even as he spoke the Mexican remembered the cry that he thought he heard when he was on the boat-landing, and then—the face in the mirror! He had been disposed to attribute both these visitations to imagination, but now he understood it all.

"Caramba!" he muttered. His feelings were too deep for any other utterance.

"She's listening for us, I guess, eh, Sondaz?" chuckled Sol Fixer, softly. "Thinks we are still lying under that plaster and stuff."

"I wonder how she got up here, eh?" muttered the Mexican, disregarding the other's remark.

He looked about him, and then, as his gaze alighted upon something in the corner, he peeped through the chink again to satisfy himself with regard to a theory he had just formed.

"Sol!" he whispered. "Now, Sol, have you ze club you always carry?"

"You bet! Hyar it is," was Fixer's response, as he exhibited a small but heavy handy-billy.

"Zat ees good. Now come."

The two worthies walked cautiously to the corner where a steep flight of stairs was revealed.

Meanwhile Mlle. Rosa was listening at the door. She thought she heard muffled scrapings and rustling, but could not be sure that the sounds were not caused by the rats that infested the old building.

"This is awful," she thought. "If Sondaz attacks me, what shall I do? One plunge of that knife, and—"

She shuddered and grew faint at the thought.

"But, no—no! This is not Mexico! He would not dare! Michigan law is swift and sure, and they hang murderers in this State now. I'll make him give up my property. I know he has it! And as for his claim on me he would never dare to try and prove it now. If I thought he would, I'd—yes, I'd shoot him down like the dog that he is!"

As she said this aloud, she drew from beneath her cloak an ivory-handled revolver, which, indeed, she had held all the time, concealed, but ready for instant action.

A creaking, unmistakable this time, struck her ear from the other side of the door.

She grasped the pistol tighter and a look of unquenchable determination came into her dark eyes.

On a small bracket on the wall was a lighted lamp. She looked toward it for an instant and considered whether she should turn it out.

"No, I would rather not meet him in the dark. Let me see what he is going to do even if I cannot prevent it. If the plaster had not broken just as I was going to look through the hole, I might have gained some idea from his actions then what he was going to do. The villain, when I saw him with that turquoise brooch in his hand, I could have killed him then!"

As she thus mused, the creaking on the other side of the door became more pronounced.

"If I did not know that he was alone, I should say there were two people coming down those stairs. Though, I don't know—they are so old that anybody's weight would make them rattle as if they were about to tumble down."

Bang!

A tremendous kick at the door against which she stood made her start back trembling.

She held her ivory-handled six-shooter as firmly as her agitation would allow. She realized that she must be self-reliant and brave in the interview that was about to take place.

"If I could only keep him out for ten minutes, perhaps things might be different," she moaned.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

The lower panel of the door trembled under the fearful blows on the other side. But the people who built the house had used good hard hickory, and it was not an easy thing for a man to put his foot through it.

She tripped lightly to the door and satisfied herself that the key was turned and that a bolt just over the lock was shot far into the stout staple in the door-post.

Another series of bangs, each one harder than the last, did not affect the solidity of the door, and then there was a pause.

What was he going to do now?

"Rosa!" cried a voice softly.

She shuddered as she recognized it as that of Fernando Sondaz.

Should she answer? Yes, it were better to parley with him with two inches of honest hickory between them, she thought.

"Rosa?"

"Yes."

"Open ze door."

"Why?"

"I want to talk wiz you."

"Talk to me through the door."

"I cannot. I have ze important zings to say."

"No one else can hear them but me. Say them now."

"Valls may have ears."

"Not these walls."

"I not know zat. Besides, you ma wife, and ze hosband should be wiz hees wife."

A feeling of uncontrollable disgust swept over the girl. This unlucky sentence of the Mexican's destroyed any hope he might have had that she would let him in. She simply answered:

"I will not open the door."

The Mexican did not speak again, and an instant later she heard the creaking of the crazy stairs.

For five—ten minutes Mlle. Rosa leaned against the door, her pistol in her hand, uncertain what to do next.

Then, there was a crash of glass behind her, and with a shriek of horror she turned, and—found herself in the grasp of Fernando Sondaz, and a burly fellow whose entire face was covered with a black crape mask.

She had forgotten that there was an unshuttered window in the room!

The masked man, who wore a long white linen duster from his throat to his heels, which, with his black mask and large slouch hat, gave him an almost supernaturally terrible appearance, passed a stout club across her back and under her arms, which he secured in a scientific manner with pieces of strong twine, and then leading her to the only chair in the room, made her sit down. Then he stepped behind her. He did not, apparently, care about her examining him too closely.

Sondaz, with his hands thrust carelessly into his pockets, stood regarding her with a supercilious smile for a minute or so.

"Vell, Madame Sondaz, to vat am I indebted for ze pleasure of your companie on Belle Isle at three o'clock in ze morning, eh?"

The girl, still holding her pistol in her hand, though her arms were trussed up so that she had no command over them, gave him a scornful look, but did not answer.

"You are Madame Sondaz, eh?"

Still no answer.

"Vell, I see you not like to talk, so I come to beezness right away, eh?"

He rolled a cigarette as he spoke, but ere he lighted it, asked, with a shrug of mock politeness:

"You not object to smoke, eh?"

She did not deign to answer, and he calmly lighted his cigarette and puffed at his ease.

"Now, Madame Sondaz, you ma wife. I can prove it by witnesses right here in ze city of

Detroit. Well, I not care so mooch about you eef—eef—you make eet it vorth ma vile."

"You mean that you can be bought off to have this so called marriage annulled?"

"Yees. I haf deserted you. You geet a de-
vorce, an' see no more of Fernando Sondaz, eh?"

A hopeful look came into the girl's eyes.

"How much do you want?"

"Two hundred thousand dollars—that all!"

For a minute the girl said nothing. She was looking straight over the Mexican's shoulder as if in deep thought, her gaze going out through the shuttered window by means of which he and his companion had entered. Sol Fixer was leaning on the back of her chair, with his head down, listening to the conversation.

"Vell, now, what vill you do?" asked the Mexican, impatiently.

Slowly, with her eyes still fixed on the broken window, she murmured:

"I consent."

CHAPTER XI.

WHAT HEY RUBE FOUND IN THE CELLAR.

AS soon as Mlle. Rosa said these words Fixer produced from an inside pocket a paper, which he handed to the Mexican over the girl's head.

Sondaz spread it out on the table, and, taking the lamp from the bracket, put it by the side of the paper. Then he pushed the table over to Rosa, and pointed to the paper.

In a business-like way Fixer took the pistol from her hand and put it in the pocket of his white duster. Then he untied the cords that bound her, and producing a fountain pen, tried it on the back of the paper and handed it to her.

She took the pen mechanically, and then, hardly knowing what she did, read the document through.

It was couched in regular legal phraseology, and stated that Mme. Rose Sondaz, nee Rose Hartley, professionally known as Mlle. Rosa, agreed to give to Fernando Sondaz, for his separate use and benefit, the sum of two hundred thousand dollars on the day that she obtained a decree of divorce from the said Fernando Sondaz. There were several clauses, all tending to make the contract binding, with a great deal of legal verbosity that she recognized as being the usual thing in papers prepared by lawyers, and which would have made her head ache had she attempted to comprehend it fully.

"Vell, haf you read it, eh?"

"Yes."

"Zen you vill sign, eh? You haf ze pen."

"Yes."

The Mexican, with an eagerness that he found it impossible to hide, bent over the table, and showed her where she should put her name.

"But I need a witness, do I not?" asked Mlle. Rosa, a misty idea to that effect suddenly floating through her brain.

"I haf provided zat. Zis gentleman, wiz ze—ze—vail over hees face, vill witness ze signature," answered Sondaz, nodding toward Sol Fixer.

"Vail is good, by thunder!" growled Fixer, under his breath.

The girl, still with her gaze fixed over the Mexican's shoulder, bent over the paper pen in hand, as if about to sign, her two captors watching her movements closely, like the two beasts of prey that they were.

"Where am I to sign?" asked the girl, timidly, and although she held her pen near the place already pointed out to her by the Mexican, she did not look at the paper, but stared vacantly over his shoulder.

"Where am I to sign?" she repeated, mechanically, as, at last, she bent her eyes on the paper.

"Here!" shouted another voice, as with a crash of glass, Reuben Rocket sprung into the room, and knocking the Mexican to the floor with one blow of his fist, he seized the paper and stuffed it into his pocket.

The man in the white duster was the first to recover himself. He had always been used to quick action, and was never to be taken very much unawares.

Almost before the detective could withdraw his hand from his pocket, after taking possession of the paper, Sol Fixer had seized him around the shoulders, and with all the power of his giant strength had borne him to the floor.

For the second time within three hours Sol Fixer and Hey Rube were engaged in a fierce personal combat, and it seemed as if the former had the best of it for a while.

Neither could get at a weapon. They had too much to do in defending themselves from the desperate onslaught of their adversary.

The mask had been torn from Fixer's face, but the lamp, having been extinguished at the moment that Hey Rube seized the paper, they were fighting in darkness, and the detective, though he had a shrewd idea of the other's identity, could not swear, from personal observation, that the man with whom he was struggling was the surly ringmaster.

The contest did not last long. By a dexterous twist, Hey Rube got the other under the table, where he could not turn over without upsetting it, and was about to plant his fist in Fixer's eye on general principles, when the latter moved

himself out in some way, and with a cry of defiance, leaped through the broken window and was gone.

The detective did not waste time in chasing him. He reflected quickly, that if it was Sol Fixer, he could deal with him at his leisure at some future day; the man he was after now was Fernando Sondaz.

In the faint light that now came through the window he satisfied himself that no one was in the room but himself. Then he found that the door communicating with the stairway already referred to, was open.

"That fellow has forced her to go with him; he must be in partnership with the foul fiend himself," muttered the detective.

Then, with a key that hung to a ring which he took from his pocket he opened the door opposite that guarding the stairway, and called softly, "Alice!"

"Yes," answered Alice Trevilyan, as she came forward in the dark and placed her hand in that of the detective.

"You are not afraid, are you?"

"No, I am not afraid, but I am rather tired," she answered, cheerfully.

"Well, it will be daylight soon, and unless we are detained by business connected with Sondaz, we will go back to the city, and you can have some rest at the hotel. The circus will have to get along in Monroe without us to-night, I am afraid."

"Where are we going now?"

"To find Sondaz."

It will be remembered that the old house on Belle Isle in which the events now being narrated, took place, was a long, rambling structure, containing about a dozen rooms. It was so irregular, and there were so many odd little closets and corners, so many twists and turns, and so many communicating passages, that a stranger could easily lose himself in them, while for purposes of concealment and the eluding of pursuers a better place could not be imagined.

Though Sondaz had undoubtedly disappeared through the opposite doorway, it was quite as likely as not that he might be just at their elbow now.

The detective was busy with a bull's-eye lantern that he had taken from his pocket, and in a moment had lighted it and was turning the powerful reflector in all directions.

"Nothing in this room, Alice, except dust," he observed. "Come this way."

He was well-supplied with keys that, in the hands of a clever manipulator would open any such ordinary locks as were to be found in this house. As a member of a secret police department, Hey Rube was, of course, a master of this branch of his business.

He returned to the room with the broken window, and there, as a sudden idea struck him, he turned his lantern upon the floor and fished up Mademoiselle Rosa's ivory-handled six-shooter which had been dropped and forgotten in the late excitement. He handed it to Alice.

"I don't suppose you will need such a thing as this, but it is well to be prepared, when you are brought into contact with a fellow like Fernando Sondaz," he said quietly.

The girl took the weapon with a simple "Thanks!" She understood that it was to be only her last resort.

"Here is the room that I suspect," muttered Reuben, as he opened the door of the principal apartment—that in which the tables and chairs and counter had indicated to Sondaz that it was the general resort during the halcyon days of the house.

He turned his lantern around, and then turning the slide, so that the light was hidden, stood still with Alice Trevilyan's hand resting lightly on his arm, to think what should be his next move.

He was morally certain that the Mexican had Mlle. Rosa's jewels either about his person or hidden in some part of this house. This consideration, alone, would have been sufficient to keep him here until they were recovered, but now, in addition, here was the owner of the jewels herself in the power of the thief, who might coerce her into anything.

Hey Rube's blood boiled at the thought. Should it be confessed that the interest he felt in Mlle. Rosa was something more than that of a detective whose professional pride was enlisted in restoring her property to her? He had known her personally for only a few weeks, but her reputation for beauty, grace and virtue had reached him years before, and it only needed a short time of acquaintanceship to engender in his bosom a love that he would not have fought down if he could have done so.

He had seen the attempt of the Mexican and Sol Fixer to persuade her into signing a paper that, if it had not been sustained by law, would have embodied a confession on the part of Rose Hartley that she was Fernando Sondaz's wife. This confession the detective was determined that she should not make, for he was convinced that the marriage down in Vera Cruz into which she had been persuaded by the oily tongue of the Mexican before she knew his real character was a mockery and could be proved such when he had gained a little more evidence.

The first thing to be done was to get Rosa out

of his power. As for Sol Fixer, though he was probably still on the island, the detective calculated that he would be likely to keep himself out of sight for the present.

Where was Sondaz? That was the question.

Hey Rube listened intently, but beyond the moaning of the wind, which had sunk somewhat, (but was still blowing with more than its usual velocity,) he could hear nothing.

He went to the window and looked out. A slight break in the thick gloom in the East, which reflected itself in the water, indicated the approach of dawn and enabled him to make out the gaunt swing, the boat landing, with a skiff lying on the sand near it, and the turbulent waters of the river beyond.

He looked back into the room, and started. He had seen something.

Without a word to Alice, who kept close to his side, he stole softly to the counter and tried to see over it to the floor inside.

All was dark.

"If I didn't see a movement in that mirror just now I never was more mistaken in my life," he thought.

On tiptoe, with a stout handy-billy ready for action in his hand, he made his way around the end of the counter, Alice still following.

He reached the cupboard door which concealed the entrance to the cellar, and feeling along gently, discovered that it was ajar.

He pulled it open a little wider, and was about to turn the slide of his bull's-eye, when something pulled his feet from under him, and he found himself rolling headlong down a flight of steps.

Before he could regain his feet and extricate himself from the barrels, boxes and other rubbish amid which he had fallen, he heard the voice of Alice Trevilyan in terrified remonstrance, there was a momentary scuffle, and then the trap shut down with a slam, as the sound of bolts being fastened outside struck his ear.

"Rube, where are we?" whispered Alice, and then he knew that the girl had been made a prisoner with him.

"Caramba!" he heard the Mexican growl in a disgusted tone. "I forgot to take them out. Suppose he should find them."

The detective heard these words because his hearing was naturally sharp, and it was the result of his training that he never allowed anything to be said or done in his presence without notice. He did not just now trouble himself to think out the significance of the Mexican's observation but he stored it away in his mind to be brought out at some more suitable time, and considered, as a cow does with its food in its stomach, until it can chew its cud at its leisure.

He got into a standing position at last, and reassuringly pressing the hand of Alice as he felt it on his arm, he lighted a match to look for his bull's-eye lantern, which he had heard bouncing down the stairs in company with himself. He found it right at his feet.

"There, Alice; that's better," he said, as he lighted it and turned its rays upon her face. "We are having a pretty lively series of adventures to-night, but I don't care so long as we are not in the dark."

Alice smiled. It was impossible not to feel encouraged under the influence of Hey Rube's cheering words. He seemed so brave and strong, and to have so many resources at his command, that she began to feel rather as if her present situation was part of a drama in which all the characters would get their rights before the fall of the curtain.

"Where are we, Rube?" she repeated, as she tried to make out surrounding objects.

"Well, Alice, my observation leads me to suppose that we are in a cellar. We are certainly not up in a balloon," answered Reuben, lightly. "That villainous relative of yours (if you will pardon my speaking of him in that familiar way) has pitched me down head-first and sent you to keep me company, under the house on Belle Isle that has so often been devoted to feasting and merriment."

Alice laughed in spite of herself, at Reuben Rocket's quaint style of summing up their situation, which, at the same time, was absolutely correct.

"Now, Alice," he went on, "we cannot stay down here. It's damp, dark, unpleasant, and, I am afraid, there is nothing to eat down here. We must find some way of getting out."

He turned the lantern in different directions and suddenly, with a cry of horror, dashed forward into a distant corner.

Alice followed the bright shaft from the lantern, and a shriek issued from her lips, as she saw what it rested upon.

The light showed with terrible distinctness, the apparently dead face of Mlle. Rosa.

CHAPTER XII.

A LEAP IN THE DARK.

WE left Budworth Buddicome, Jim Swan and Munch Jones standing around the royal Bengal tiger in the grove at Grand River avenue.

"Say, you fellers, hadn't I better go over ter der cage, an see whether I kin git it fixed up

ready fer his jags?" asked Munch, with a toss of his head, and a throwing out of his chin.

"Guess you'd better step up and file the tiger's teeth so ez he won't do no more harm. Then yer might slap him in ther jaw with yer fist jist ter show him ez yer ain't afraid on him," said Jim Swan contemptuously.

"That 'u'd be a blooming lark, Munch," put in Bud. "I like to see a cove with plenty of pluck like you."

"Well, now, I want ter see der man as says I ain't able to lay out any tigers as ever I met," returned Munch, with the inevitable tilt of the soft hat.

Bud, who was holding the rope that secured the tiger by the tail, here gave it a sharp pull. The result was that the great beast uttered a growl and sprung forward as far as the ropes would let him.

Munch beat an undignified retreat amid the laughter of his two tormentors.

"Come back, Munch. He won't hurt yer, I never see such a blooming chump!" exclaimed Bud, in an ecstasy of enjoyment.

"What's der matter wid you?" growled Munch, trying to be very fierce. "My foot caught in a stump, an' I nearly fell over, that's all."

Jim Swan had gone over to the wagons to see what was the extent of the damage to the cage. He found that it was not broken at all. The shock of its overturning had shaken out the bolts of the door, and thrown it open, enabling the tiger to escape. The wheels under the cage, however, were in a badly wrecked condition and it would be impossible to move the wagon until the services of a wheelwright had been employed.

He called Munch, and that hero swung across the field in the darkness and appeared in the glare of the torches and lanterns that were scattered liberally about near the gateway in the fence.

Several of the idlers that are always on hand when a circus is getting ready to move out of town at whatever time of night or morning it may be came forward now that they learned the tiger was secured, and offered assistance.

"Crowbars and levers, Munch," commanded Jim Swan, briefly, and Mr. Jones, with a dignified strut and a contemptuous glance at the awe-struck outriders, brought half a dozen iron bars from beneath the leopard-wagon and distributed them among the men who were willing to help.

A few minutes' work served to put the cage right side up, but not on the wheels. It rested flat on the ground.

More ropes were brought into requisition and placed around the neck of the tiger, who was also rendered more nearly harmless by having a short iron bar thrust in his mouth by Jim Swan, who fastened it in its place with ropes, and compelled the animal to keep his mouth wide open in a ghastly grin.

Then the ropes that fastened him to the trees were loosened cautiously and, with Jim on one side and Bud on the other, the tiger was led to the cage, Munch walking behind with his iron bar ready to use it as a club at the first sign of rebellion.

Very little difficulty was experienced in getting the tiger into his cage, and it was with a sigh of satisfaction that Munch saw the door fastened and knew that his highness from Bengal was powerless again.

Several of the other tent and animal men who had gone down to the railroad before the collision, and who had grown impatient waiting for the stragglers, now came through the gateway. They saw at once what had happened and with the coolness that could only come from experience, proceeded to estimate the damage and decide upon the quickest method by which it could be repaired.

Budworth Buddicombe had gone over to his drum and was looking it over carefully to make sure that it had not suffered any injury in the general hubbub.

"Bud," whispered Tim, as he watched Mr. Buddicombe, thoughtfully. "Bud!"

"Well, what is it? Say, look at the blooming snatch on the side of this drum. It seems to me that some coves are never satisfied except when they are hurting some one else's property," grumbled Bud, as he thought he detected signs of ill-usage on his precious instrument.

"Yes, but—Bud," persisted the boy.

"I'd have to buy a new drum every week if some coves had their way," continued Bud, too absorbed in contemplation of his drum to pay much heed to Tim.

"It is a shame, Bud, but I want to speak about some one else—Hey Rube."

"What about him?"

Reuben Rocket was a man whom Bud greatly admired, and he was always interested in anything that concerned him.

"He has gone to Belle Isle, and—(Don't ask any questions till I tell you all about it)—I believe that Sol Fixer and that Mexican are there, too."

Buddicombe was about to make an exclamation of astonishment, but the boy held up a finger warningly, and proceeded:

"Alice went with Rube, and there's something in the wind, but I don't know what."

Again Buddicombe would have spoken, and again Tim stopped him with a gesture, and continued:

"You know that Fernando Sondaz is a sort of cousin of Alice's and mine, and I think it is something about that, but I don't know for certain."

"But—"

"Wait a minute, Bud. That is not all."

"Not all? Well, I think it is blooming well enough," blurted out Buddicombe. He had to say something or burst.

"Yes, it may be enough, but there is more of it."

"Go on," directed Bud, resignedly, leaning upon his big drum, as if he would seek support from that faithful friend.

"Well, it is about Mlle. Rosa's jewels. Fernando stole them, I'm sure, and it is to try and get them back that Mlle. Rosa has—gone to Belle Isle."

If Tim wanted to overwhelm Mr. Buddicombe with astonishment he certainly gained his desire. Bud actually let his drum fall over upon the ground without a groan and was compelled to lean against the fence to save himself from doing the same thing. At last, he drew a tremendously long breath and gasped:

"Well, I'm blowed!"

"So am I," acquiesced Tim.

"Mlle. Rosa! Belle Isle! Two o'clock in the morning! Why," with horrified energy, "the blooming island is full o' snakes!"

This consideration seemed to put the crowning touch to Bud's determination.

"Tim," he said, solemnly. "I'm going to Belle Isle, this blooming instant."

"Are you?" asked the boy, with a gratified smile. "Then you're a dandy. I'm going with you. But, Bud," with sudden gravity, "what about your drum?"

Bud paused. For the moment he had forgotten his drum. Then as a brilliant thought struck him, he slapped his right fist with tremendous force into the palm of his left hand, and said:

"We'll take the drum with us!"

Then Tim knew that Mr. Buddicombe was, indeed, thoroughly in earnest.

Bud was a man of his word. He took up his drum on his shoulder, and was marching away through the gate without another word to any one. Tim followed him. He had great faith in Bud.

The tiger had been safely caged by this time and Munch Jones was standing by the wagon, with his hands in his pockets and every indication of supreme self-satisfaction.

"Hallo! Where's Bud an' Tim goin to?" he muttered. "Cully, I guess I'll go along wid dem an' see what's on der board. Can't fool dis daisy, now!"

Looking hastily around and seeing that another driver had taken charge of the leopard wagon that was his own particular care, he slipped through the gateway and followed Bud and Tim down Grand River avenue, keeping back far enough to be hidden from them in the darkness.

But Munch was not the only person to notice the peculiar actions of the drummer and Tim. Munch had hardly placed himself upon their trail when a short, thick-set man also joined in the chase.

The short thick-set man was Jim Swan. He was not a very talkative individual, but his eyes and ears were abnormally sharp.

Down the avenue went the three men and the boy. Some times a police officer looked for a moment at Bud, and seemed inclined to ask him the nature of his burden, but a second glance was sufficient to reveal the fact that it was only a base-drum, and with a muttered "circus people," the officer resumed his beat and allowed Bud and his drum to proceed unmolested.

For over half an hour they walked on at a brisk pace, that sometimes broke into a trot. They made several turns and twists, and at last the coolness of the wind, that had been blowing harder and harder every minute, gave token that they were approaching the river.

Bud and Tim knew the way perfectly, and never hesitated in plunging down dark streets or alleys, no matter how forbidding their aspect, or how little appeared the hope of their leading again into an open thoroughfare.

Down Brush street, and a great dark building faced them.

"Detroit and Milwaukee Railroad freight depot," observed Bud, in a matter-of-fact way, as he crossed a broad thoroughfare that ran parallel with the river, and that was, and is, known as Atwater street.

After a little fumbling about in the dark, Bud found a small gate, which yielded to his touch, and showed a black cavernous place beyond.

It required considerable management to get the big drum through, but Bud accomplished the feat at last, and having stepped inside with Tim, pushed the gate to again.

"What are we doing here, Bud?" whispered Tim. "This is the side entrance to the freight depot, and if we are not careful we shall walk into the river, to say nothing of perhaps being arrested as suspicious characters."

"You're a blooming smart young cove, Tim, and you know the ways of the world as well as one of them there reporter chaps, but you're a little off in this thing. Trust your friend Bud for knowing of his business, and he'll bring you through all right, and show yer lots of blooming larks as well."

There is reason to believe that Budworth Buddicombe winked as he delivered himself of this oracular speech, but it was too dark to see it if he did, and Tim had to leave it to his imagination.

"Bud, don't you think it is dangerous to be loafing about railroad property at three o'clock in the morning?" remonstrated Tim.

As Bud had intimated, the boy was no fool, and had learned a good deal about worldly ways in his career as a circus performer. He was fully cognizant of the danger that might attend the unlawful prowling about on railroad property at an unseemly hour, and he had no wish to find himself in the hands of the police on suspicion of being a thief.

"Bud," he continued, "I think we had better get out of this as soon as possible. This is not the way to Belle Isle, I'm sure."

"Oh, it ain't, eh?" returned Bud. "Wait till I show you, my covey. Follow me, and let me tell you that it ain't three o'clock yet, either. I ain't no blooming infant, Tim. I know my business."

Budworth Buddicombe was evidently on his dignity, so Tim did not say anything more, but followed him with due respect and silent footsteps.

"Whew! How the wind does blow!" exclaimed Bud, as a gust whistled around the corner of the immense freight shed, and, catching the big drum, nearly knocked its bearer from his feet.

In the bustle of getting his drum back into its proper position on his back and shoulders, Bud did not notice a slam of the little gate that otherwise he could have heard above the roaring of the wind. Jim Swan and Munch Jones were close upon his heels.

Bud walked on in the pitchy darkness, and turning to the left, led Tim along the open wharf at the river's edge, where steamers and large sailing vessels from all lake ports were accustomed to stop and deliver their cargoes.

The wind had now risen almost to a hurricane, and it was impossible to converse. Every word was at once blown back and down the throat of the speaker.

"Where is that blooming place, I wonder?" muttered Bud. "I never had any trouble in striking it before. There is always something to worry a bloke, seems to me."

With Tim at his elbow he walked the whole length of the wharf, glancing at the white-caps that rolled down the river and dashed angrily against the poles that supported the wharf. The drum wobbled about on Bud's back, and threatened occasionally to overbalance him, and roll him into the river; but he kept bravely on, having evidently a clearly defined purpose in view.

Tim would have liked to ask him what the object was in coming to this place, when he was so anxious to reach Belle Isle and render that assistance to his sister and Reuben Rocket that he now felt a strange and overpowering premonition was so desperately needed.

But it was impossible to address his companion with any hope of being heard, and he could only await developments as patiently as might be.

And still the two dark figures that had slipped through the little gateway crawled along in the shadow of the freight-shed, and within but a few yards of Buddicombe and Tim Trevilyan.

The wharf is a long one, and what with the trouble with his drum and the high wind, Bud took considerable time to traverse it.

When near the end, he ventured to the extreme edge of the wharf, and tried to look down into the water that curled so treacherously around the piles.

"Nothing but blooming water, eh?" he muttered. "I'm bound to see this thing through now, though. I have a few suspicions that don't bother Tim, and I'm going to get to Belle Isle somehow."

He stepped back from the edge, and with his big drum swung clear behind him, so as to have his hands free, glided swiftly to the end of the dock.

For a minute, perhaps, he stood on the brink, and then, stretching out his hands over the turbulent waters, he gave a slight spring, and, to Tim's horror, disappeared.

CHAPTER XIII.

A TEMPESTUOUS VOYAGE.

SCARCELY had Tim realized that his friend had gone than two forms ran forward from the shadow of the freight shed, and stood one on each side of him.

"Whar is he?" asked Jim Swan's voice. "Yes, where did der duck git ter?" added the dulcet accents of the "tough" Munch Jones.

"He jumped cl'ar off the dock—I saw him do it!" continued Jim Swan.

"Bet yer bottom dollar der chump is under dem dere piles in der drink. D'ye want ter take me up, eh?" squeaked Jones.

Tim did not speak. He was dumfounded, and could not even express surprise at the extraordinary appearance of Swan and Munch Jones in this out-of-the-way place at such an hour.

"Don't hear him splashing nor nothing," observed Jim Swan. "Ef it wasn't so dark! Seems ter me it hez got darker in ther last few minutes."

"Bet yer boots it has. Dere is a great cloud just come up in der sky and shut out everything. It'll git lighter d'reckly," declared Munch, with a tilt of his hat that he could hardly expect to be effective in the darkness when no one could see it, but that he executed from mere force of habit.

"Halloa, Tim!"

It was Bud's voice, coming from below, somewhere in the water.

"Halloa Bud! Where are you?" answered Tim.

"Here I am, down here, my covey. It's all right."

"Are you in the water?"

"Water? Not much! I'm in this here blooming boat, in course."

At this moment, the cloud that Munch had spoken of passed away and relieved the thick gloom in a slight degree, enabling the boy to see a long pole bobbing about close to the wharf, which he recognized as the mast of a small sailing boat.

He understood Bud's disappearance now. He had grasped this mast, and dropped into the boat.

"Here's a blooming lantern in the locker," said Bud, as he poked about in a busy manner in the small craft. "Guess I'd better light it. This little dock here belongs to a particular friend of mine—a good-natured cove—and I have the use of the boat whenever I want it. I have the key of the boat-house at the back there, but the boat was outside to-day, and I didn't have quite as much trouble as I expected."

"Funny thing for a boat to be out there at this time in the morning," hazarded Tim.

"Is it? Tim, you ain't so smart as I thought you was, my covey. Don't you know that Canada is on the other side of the river, and don't you know when you take things over there or bring them here, that you're a bold smuggler?"

"Oh!"

"Yes, indeed. Mind, I don't say my friend is a smuggler to any serious extent, but he's the son of a rich man, and sometimes he gets tired of the blooming style that he has to sling on among the high-toned ducks. Then when he wants a blooming lark he just jumps into this little craft and goes over to Canada for a few bottles of Catawba wine that he has bought during the day and hidden near the docks, and brings them over after midnight. Then he feels like one of them smugglers that you've heard about and seen on the stage, with long hair hanging over their shoulders, and wide belts, with big buckles, around their waists, and pistols, weighing about ten pounds each, stuck in their belts! See?"

Bud chuckled as he talked, all the time busying himself with the lantern, which, when lighted showed itself to be a large glass affair, that shed its gleams freely in every direction.

"So you see," went on Mr. Buddicombe, "it is quite a natural thing for me to find the boat here. It's wet, too, which shows that it hasn't been in long. I suppose my friend shipped a few blooming waves as he came across. It's been a pretty rough night and morning, and I guess it is impossible to sail very far on the Detroit River in a gale without taking in more or less of the blooming moisture."

As Bud finished his peroration he hung the lamp in regular nautical fashion to the mast and having deposited the big drum carefully amidships, now found time to look up at Tim.

"Halloa! Who's them coves with yer?"

"It's all right, Bud, yer betcher life!" answered Munch. "Me and Jim Swan's here an' we're goin' ter see yer through, whatever it is."

"We thought ez thar mought be fun, Bud, an' as it consarned Reuben, why we came along. S'pose ye'r willin' ter have us, eh?" added Swan.

"Well, I should say I am willing to have you, Jim. There ain't a cove in the whole State of Michigan that I'd rather see than yo' now. Though, I can't see you very well, either," observed Bud, adding: "Well, get aboard, all three of you, right away. There's plenty of room. This boat was built to hold eight or ten."

Tim was the first to accept the invitation. Light and active, he reached for the mast—the bow of the boat, bowsprit and all, being under the railroad wharf—and slid down into the stern by the side of Bud, who, with his hand on the rudder bar, was quite the old salt.

An instant later Swan and Jones were stowed away in their proper places according to Bud's judgment, where they would "trim ship," as he called it, and not interfere with him in the science of navigation.

With the key that fitted the door of the boat-house to which he had just referred, Mr. Buddicombe unlocked a chain that secured the boat

to a pile, and slipping the chain, he put the key in his pocket and gave orders to everybody to shove off.

When near the mouth of the dock, but before getting into the full sweep of the wind, Bud hoisted his mainsail and jib, and telling his three companions to lay low so that they wouldn't be swept overboard by the main-boom in case it should swing over, kept a steady hand on the tiller and ran his craft out into mid-stream.

Bud soon showed that he was an expert in the management of a boat. The strong current was dead against him, but the wind, "nor'-west-by-nor'," as he pronounced it, was as good as he required. He sailed close-hauled, with the rudder hard aport, and though the water rushed over the gunwale, as the boat keeled heavily to leeward, and all four, captain and crew, were rendered uncomfortably damp, very quick time was made to the island.

The wind blew out the light in the lantern as soon as they got beyond the shelter of the wharf, but Bud did not mind that. He knew the river pretty well, and if there had been any other craft out they would be sure to have lights.

"Tim," yelled Bud, when they had been scudding along for about ten minutes, "where do you think them coves will go on the island? Somewhere toward the upper end?"

Bud had been careful to get to windward of the boy while speaking, and the words were blown right into Tim's ear.

"I don't know, Bud, unless they go into the house near the landing."

"That house is empty and locked up, but I don't think they would dare to go there. There is a big bull-mastiff kept there by the owners of it."

"Well, I don't know, Bud."

"I didn't suppose you did. So I'll do what I meant to do—land a little way up the island on the American side, and then we can see. I'm in for a lark now, and as long as I have my drum all safe, I don't care nothing about the circus."

Bud did not prolong the conversation. He saw that Belle Isle was very near, and he did not wish to dim the luster he had already gained as a navigator, by running aground on the shoals of the island and bringing the whole party to grief.

"Stand by all!" he proclaimed, in stentorian tones, as he proceeded to execute the maneuver known as "tacking."

He had seen that it would be necessary to make one tack to avoid a long reach of sand that he knew stretched from the island at the lower end about a foot under water.

"What d'ye say?" bawled Munch, who was thoroughly mystified by the command to "stand by."

Bud did not hear him. The wind was blowing the wrong way.

"He means look out," explained Swan, in Munch's ear.

Swan, who, with Munch was seated amidships, here dropped in the bottom of the boat, and put his head down. Tim, seated near the tiller, did the same thing.

Munch Jones, with his favorite toss of the chin, and pulling down of his soft hat, was about to make some remark, when Bud, having got his running tackle loose, put his helm to starboard.

For a moment the big sail fluttered and flapped, while the cordage of the jib strained and creaked as if in agony. Then suddenly the wind caught the canvas, the great boom swept across the deck, and the cutter dashed away on the starboard tack.

"Hold on! Hold on! Bud! Bud!" screamed Tim, as he excitedly seized Buddicombe by the arm.

"What's the matter? Let go of my blooming arm."

"Bud, Bud!"

"Well?"

"Munch—Munch Jones!"

"Yes?"

"He's gone. The spar knocked him off. He—he—will be drowned," gasped the boy.

"What? Here's a blooming go!" cried Bud. Then, remembering his nautical character, he shouted: "Man overboard! All hands ahoy!"

He made another tack with considerable dexterity, and another, and another. He cruised all about the place where he calculated Jones had been knocked into the river, but in the darkness, and with the wind lashing the water into a tempest, he could not be sure.

"Poor Munch. He warn't a bad sort o' cove after all!" muttered Bud. "I'd give ten years salary to save him, but I'm afraid it is of no use."

Jim Swan lay in the bottom of the boat, when he realized that his companion was indeed gone, and something like a tear trickled down his rugged cheek. He laughed at Jones's "tough" ways, but he did not dislike the young fellow, and his sudden death seemed too horrible for belief.

Tim, with the hopefulness of youth, could not believe that Jones had been drowned, in spite of Bud's declaration that the blow from the boom must have stunned him, even if he was a good swimmer, about which no one knew anything.

It was about this time that Fernando Sondaz

was gloating over the jewels behind the counter in the house, when he was so much disturbed by seeing the face in the mirror, but of that episode Bud and his friends had no suspicion, while, as we know, they were the last persons that the Mexican would have expected to find upon the island.

Bud, having abandoned all hope of finding Munch Jones, paid strict attention to his boat. Several tacks were necessary, the boat having got a great deal out of her course in the search for the missing Jones, causing Bud to lose his bearings.

"It's all right," he growled, at last. "I ain't ther cove to be fogged by any blooming dark night. I see where I am now."

He did not say anything more, but headed his craft for a spot of light that he made out on the right, amid the thick blackness, that all three knew was Belle Isle.

A swift run of about two minutes, and the cutter's nose ran into a soft bank of sand and mud.

Bud was up to his eyes in business. He pulled up the center-board, and pushing the tiller to extreme starboard, fastened it there with the rudder-lock.

"All hands furl sail!" he proclaimed, and at once lowered the mainsail, and clewed up the braces of the jib with his own hands.

He would have been disappointed if his two companions had offered to assist him, but he dearly loved the idea of being an old salt for the nonce, and in that character issuing commands with the dignity of a first officer on a frigate.

In a few minutes everything was secured, and Bud, in his character of a brave sea-captain, made Tim and Jim Swan leap ashore first, he being the last to leave his ship, with his relighted lantern in his hand.

Hardly had the three reached the top of the bank, when Jim Swan, rushing forward, grasped by the hand a man who was standing under a tree, looking, in the rays of Bud's lantern, like a disconsolate mermaid.

The man was Munch Jones!

CHAPTER XIV.

AN AWFUL POSITION.

It did not take Hey Rube long to recover from his astonishment at beholding the face of Mlle. Rosa in the cellar under the old house on Belle Isle.

With his bull's-eye lantern wide open, so that the light would be spread in all directions, he rushed toward the girl, and taking her wrist, felt eagerly for the beating of her pulse.

"Is she dead?" whispered Alice.

"No, no. She has been put under the influence of an anesthetic—chloroform, I guess, from the smell—but she is getting better."

Taking off his broad-brimmed felt hat, the detective fanned the unconscious Rosa until she showed signs of life. In ten minutes she was able to talk, though still sick and dizzy.

"Rube!" she whispered, as she saw who was bending over her, and the detective felt a thrill of pleasure as he noted with what tender trustfulness she pronounced his name.

"Keep quiet, Rosa. Alice, sit by her side and talk to her while I look about and see what chances there are for getting out of this place. I do not care to let Fernando keep us here very long because I have no doubt that he is hatching some plot to gain his ends. Both of you have equal interest in frustrating his villainies, and it is important that you should be equal to any calls upon your fortitude and courage."

He smiled as he said these words and then added, with an admiring glance at Alice and Rosa:

"I have not any fear that either of you will be wanting in these respects."

Placing his lantern, open, on the head of a barrel, he commenced a systematic examination of the cellar.

First he walked quietly up the stairs and listened at the trap-door.

"Just as I thought," he muttered, inaudibly.

"Both of them are up there and I suppose they are deliberating whether they shall kill me and terrorize the girls into silence, or whether they shall only knock me senseless and leave me down here."

He pushed the trap, but, as he had anticipated, it was securely fastened above. He now produced a six-shooter which had hitherto been hidden in his clothes, for Reuben Rocket did not care about displaying firearms unless occasion demanded.

"Alice, have you that ivory-handled toy I gave you?" he asked.

"Yes, here it is," said the girl, taking the revolver from her belt and holding it up.

"My pistol!" exclaimed Rosa, faintly.

"Yes, Rosa, yours. Alice, give it to her, and you take this one. I have another about me. I always carry two, for emergencies. I am glad to see that Mlle. Rosa is well enough to pull a trigger if it should be required of her."

"I will kill Fernando Sondaz before I will fall into his power again," exclaimed Rosa, with sudden energy.

"Well, upon my word, Rosa, I don't blame

you for feeling that way; but let that be a last resort. We may be able to circumvent him without your acting as his executioner," said Rube.

The detective felt that he was speaking the truth. Something seemed to tell him that Sondaz would not always have the best of the controversy.

"Now, we must use a little diplomacy in getting out of this place. Fernando Sondaz must not be allowed to come down here until we are ready for him," continued Rube.

He showed what he meant by collecting the barrels, boxes and other lumber that lay about the cellar, and piling them up at the foot of the stairs. Then he put more on top and soon the whole stairway was blocked to the very trap-door.

"That's good," observed Rube, with a nod of satisfaction, as he surveyed the result of his labors. "But I guess there is room in the pile for that box behind the barrel over there."

He pulled the barrel referred to from its place with considerable difficulty, for it was imbedded in the dirt floor, as if it had been undisturbed for years. It came out at last, and then Reuben Rocket uttered an involuntary whistle.

"What is it, Rube?" asked Alice, running to the spot. "What are you looking at?"

Then she threw up her hands in joyful amazement, and stooping, picked up the bag of jewels that Sondaz had hidden there.

The Mexican had put the bag down carelessly, so that the mouth of it remained open, revealing at a glance the nature of its contents to Hey Rube and Alice Trevilyan.

Mlle. Rosa, who had now almost entirely recovered from the effects of the chloroform, recognized the brilliant collection at once, and Hey Rube recalled the words he had heard the Mexican utter when he made Alice and the detective prisoners.

"Well, there is one part of our mission fulfilled!" observed Rube, joyfully. "The rest of it I could manage with him alone, if I could only get you two girls to a place of safety."

"No, Rube. I have gone so far now that I will never leave Sondaz until I get released from him entirely in some way."

"Don't you be afraid, Rosa. You are to all intents and purposes free from him now."

Mlle. Rosa looked around her with a queer little smile.

"Yes, I know," he remarked quickly. "You do not think we are free while we are shut up in this cellar. But this will not last long. It will not be more than a few hours at the most. I took care of that before I came. But I think we can escape without any assistance."

There was something so encouraging in the very tones of his voice, independently of what he said, that his two companions felt better in spite of themselves.

"Rube!" suddenly exclaimed Mlle. Rosa.

"Yes."

"One of my jewels is missing—a turquoise brooch, set with diamonds."

"Ah! The brooch you got in Paris, that you nearly always wear in the ring?"

"Yes."

"Sure it isn't in the bag?"

"Quite. See!"

Mlle. Rosa turned everything from the bag into her lap, and the detective, who knew the turquoise brooch very well, saw at once that it was not there.

"Well, we know where it is, that's one consolation. We will recover it, never fear. It is in that rascally Mexican's pocket, of course," said Hey Rube.

Mlle. Rosa replaced the jewels in the bag, and at the detective's suggestion fastened them around her waist by a long black ribbon that, in the character of a sash, was fastened to her dress. Then, letting her waterproof cloak fall over the bag, no one would have suspected that she had anything of the kind in her possession.

"Ah, here is just what I expected to find," cried the detective, as he pulled a stone out of the wall opposite the stairs. "I thought it strange if there was not some provision for ventilation down here. You see, they used to keep food in this place, and they could not have done so unless there was plenty of air."

The opening he made by pulling out the stone was about eight inches square.

"It was getting very close down here," said Alice, as she led Mlle. Rosa to the opening and allowed her to drink in deep draughts of the river breeze that was quiet enough when it reached the cellar, though obstreperous enough without.

"Yes, it was," assented Hey Rube, "but that is not our only trouble. I do not intend to use this hole as a means of ventilation alone, but of escape, and," he added below his breath, "of vengeance!"

The stone that he had pulled out he deposited in a corner. Then he tried to dislodge some of those around him. He calculated that it would be necessary to take out at least four stones of the same size as that he had already removed before he could get through the wall.

Once through, and, as his observation showed him, he would be at the front of the house, within easy reach of the four boats that he had

already satisfied himself were moored within a few yards of each other, though no one of the owners had come across any of the others.

On the Canadian side of the island was Fernando's light skiff in which he had made his way quickly to temporary safety after eluding the detective. A little further along was the yawl in which Hey Rube and Alice had come. Sol Fixer's boat, as we know, was pulled up on the sand at the small wooden landing, and a trim little skiff with dainty, velvet-covered seats, gilt rowlocks and the most expensive oars and other fittings, was hidden in some bushes within a stone's throw of the landing. It was the private property of Mlle. Rosa, and was always kept ready for use in a boat-house almost opposite the island. She was very fond of rowing, and would often travel forty or fifty miles from surrounding towns to enjoy her favorite recreation on the Detroit River.

Hey Rube argued that if he cut off all means of the Mexican's escape from the island by taking away the boats, it should be an easy matter to arrest him for theft of Mlle. Rosa's jewelry, and then force from him a confession that his marriage to her was only a pretense. As to his hold over Alice, the detective would require to examine certain legal documents very closely. After that, he would know how to proceed. In the mean time, there was no particular hurry. They had a whole year before the Mexican could take advantage of the curious provision of Alice's father's will, and by the time the year was up, perhaps Fernando would not be in a position to cause much trouble to the girl.

These thoughts coursed through his mind as he tugged away at the stones on each side of the eight-inch opening.

"This won't do," he muttered at last. "I have not enough strength in my fingers to get these stones out, but they are a little loose, and one or two good hard blows would, I think, start them."

He looked around him, and his gaze lighted upon the heavy stone he had already pulled out.

Picking it up and striking it with all his force against one of the loose stones in the wall, he had the satisfaction of seeing that the hole would soon be much larger.

Two or three more blows and a stone tumbled out—the other way, this time, outside of the cellar. Rube now worked with a will. Stone after stone gave way under his repeated bangs and pulls, and at last, covered with dust and mortar, and in a profuse perspiration, he had the satisfaction of announcing that there was room now to get out.

All through the work he had repeatedly glanced in the direction of the trap-door.

No one appeared there, and he decided in his own mind that the Mexican and his companion—whom as yet, the detective only suspected to be Sol Fixer, not having seen his face—had gone outside the house, and were perfecting some plans for the recovery of their booty hidden in the cellar without coming in contact with himself or letting the secret of their hiding-place be known.

But Hey Rube was wrong in his supposition. Although he had not seen the trap-door move it had been raised a little, and a small piece of wood thrust through the aperture, so that the trap would remain open a couple of inches.

This two inches of space afforded the Mexican all he required for a full view of Hey Rube's operations.

"Caramba! Ze man ees a fool, to zink I not watch heem. Bah! You detectives! Zey know nothing—nothing!" he muttered, under his breath, as he saw Reuben laboriously removing stone after stone from the wall.

He could not satisfy himself as to whether the jewels had been discovered by the detective or Rosa, but since the barrel was still in its place—for Hey Rube had put it back after taking away the canvas bag—he assured himself that his secret was still safe.

At last he saw the detective take out the last stone that would have to be removed to give him plenty of room to crawl through.

"Caramba! I vill teach you how you baf fun wiz Fernando, eh?" he muttered, as he softly let down the trap and fastened it. "Sol Feexer."

"Wal!"

Sol had been standing by his side, rather sullenly, for the jewels had not been divided and it began to look as if the little scheme that was to make the ringmaster \$100,000 richer, would fall through.

"Sol, get zat beelly of yours all ready, an' come out of ze house."

"All right."

"An' when he poke hees head through ze hole, you bit it, eh?"

"Wal!"

"Zat will be ze splendid vay. Zen we can get ze diamonds and Mademoiselle Rosa, and go away comfortably while we make her sign ze papare."

"And then she will give you up ter ther police, eh?" added Sol, with a sneer.

"Caramba! You never mind. I feex zat. Fernando Sondaz not a fool," hissed the Mexican savagely.

It was now rapidly getting light, though still very early in the morning.

The two went around by way of the kitchen and hid themselves in the doorway. From this position they could see the hole in the wall that had been made by Reuben at such a cost of toil and patience.

"Caramba! Eet ees a shame to spoil such a nice arrangement," whispered Sondaz, with a grin.

"Hist! Thar he is," returned Sol, touching the Mexican's arm.

"Vait till he geet half-way out, and zen—"

Sol nodded. There was no occasion for Sondaz to finish the sentence.

The hole was only just large enough for Hey Rube to squeeze through, and he brought a great deal of dust with him.

Slowly, inch by inch, he came out. His arms were extended, but he could not use them very much. He was pinned in the hole, and could only get through by working his whole body.

At this moment he saw the Mexican and Sol Fixer. The latter still wore his black mask, but the detective recognized him in spite of it in the half-light of daybreak.

"Caramba! Gif it him!" yelled Fernando, as he dashed forward with his uplifted dirk in his hand.

"Hold on, thar! Don't use yer knife! Let me give him er tap with this hyar!" bawled Sol as he threw himself between Sondaz and the helpless Hey Rube.

"Caramba! You mind your beezness!"

The Mexican was about to bury his knife between the detective's shoulders, and the latter made a terrible struggle to extricate himself in some way.

Then there was a crash, a cloud of dust, and an exclamation from Sol Fixer:

"The house is falling down!"

The digging through of the wall had weakened it, and about a ton of stonework had sunk down and was holding Hey Rube as in a vise.

CHAPTER XV.

A FLANK MOVEMENT OF THE ENEMY.

THE Mexican was so staggered by the unexpected disaster that had befallen Hey Rube, that he involuntarily drew back and put his knife in its sheath out of sight.

Strangely enough, the detective did not lose consciousness, in spite of the weight that rested upon his back and shoulders. He closed his eyes, but his ears were as sharp as usual.

"That thar settles him, I guess, eh, Fernando?" exclaimed Sol Fixer, taking off his mask.

"Now, let's get down into the cellar and see what the women are doing. I've stayed on this island about as long as I want ter. It's all right in the middle of a dark night, but it is a little too much exposed in daylight, when you are in a business that yer don't want ter show ter all ther world."

"Caramba! I not go in ze cellar," said the Mexican, shrugging his shoulders.

"Why not?"

"Vhy not? You think I want ze house to fall on me, eh? Caramba! Vhy not? Plenty of vhy nots, I zink. Sol!"

"You're er coward, Sondaz, with all yer bluff," replied Sol, contemptuously. "I'll go down myself. I don't propose ter leave them gals down thar, an' you wouldn't, either, ef yer was half er man. I kin play dirt on men sometimes, but I allers draws ther line at women. Git out o' my way!"

He pushed the Mexican roughly aside as he spoke, and ran into the house by the kitchen doorway, replacing his mask as he did so.

"Caramba! You getting too—too—freesh, Sol Feexer. I remember thee, always!"

As Sondaz grated these words from between his tightly-closed teeth, his look toward Sol was one of venomous hate, and Fixer had an enemy in him for life.

Sol was unconscious of all this, however, as he rushed into the big room with the counter, and reaching the trap, unfastened and pulled it up.

He found the stairs blocked, as already described, and Rosa and Alice standing in the middle of the cellar in mortal terror. They were unhurt, because though the wall had sagged down upon Hey Rube, none of the rubbish had dropped into the cellar.

"Halloa, down thar!"

"Sol Fixer!" exclaimed Mlle. Rosa.

She recognized his voice at once, when he spoke in his ordinary loud tones.

"Sol Fixer!" repeated Alice. "Then I was right, after all."

"How was yer right?" demanded Sol, gruffly, as he pulled off his mask, and began pulling the boxes and barrels up through the open trap.

"Why, I thought you had come to the island, and I told Reuben so, and, sure enough, here you are," returned Alice, hardly thinking what she said.

"Yes, hyar I am, and it's er a good thing fer you ez I am," growled Sol. "Help me with these hyar barrels. Pull 'em down; they are too big to come through this hyar hole. I want ter git yer out of hyar. As for Rube, he's a goner, I'm afraid. Not thet I keer very much

fer that, for I guess I'd ha' hed ter rub him out inyself some time, ef he hadn't gone now," he added, grimly.

Mlle. Rosa, ghastly pale, looked at him an instant with her dark eyes blazing with fury, but the next instant tears came to her relief, and, with a vain effort to choke back a sob, she helped Alice to clear the way to the staircase.

Sol gave his hand to Alice first, and then to Mlle. Rosa, and helped them both out of the cellar to the comparative safety of the large room behind the counter.

As he did so, he found the Mexican standing near the counter on the outside.

"Oh, yer got over yer skeer, did ye, an' come in, eh?" was Fixer's contemptuous greeting.

"*Caramba!* I show you yet whether I am scared. I—I—"

"Oh, give us er rest. What are yer going ter do with these hyer gals? Ef yer hev any business with 'em ye'd better git through with it right hyar, for I don't feel very safe, an' I don't want ter hev nothin' to do with er job that may end in ther Penitentiary."

"*Caramba!* But you are ze good man, eh? I salute you, senior!" answered the Mexican, with a low bow.

As Sol did not answer, he came around the counter, and, peering into the trap, added:

"I haf ze beezness in ze cellar. Just wait a minute until I come up."

He went cautiously down the stairs, and over to the corner where he had left the jewelry. At once he realized that it had been removed.

"*Caramba!*" he yelled. "I vill kill ze person that took my property. I vill—"

His rage choked him, but as he rushed up the cellar stairs with his dirk in his hand, Mlle. Rosa, moved by a sudden impulse, kicked the trap-door down, and kneeling upon it, shot the two bolts that rendered it secure.

"Hold on thar!" yelled Sol Fixer, as he jumped forward to release his partner. He did not carry his resentment toward the Mexican far enough to let him be discomfited by any one but himself, if he could help it.

"Hold on yerself, yer blooming chump!" shouted another voice.

"That's what. I'm the duck as don't take none of yer slack!" added some one else.

Fixer turned quickly, and found himself facing two pistols, in the hands of Budworth Buddicombe and Munch Jones, while Tim Trevilyan and Jim Swan stood just behind, also armed with revolvers.

Like a hunted animal, Sol, who, villain as he was, possessed the courage of a lion, moved toward the end of the counter, intending to leap over and make for the door, taking all chances of being shot while doing so. But another obstacle stood in his path, in the shape of Alice Trevilyan, who, pistol in hand, and with a steady finger on the trigger, silently dared him to move forward another step.

"Throw up yer hands, Sol. It's ther best thing ez you kin do," observed Jim Swan, carelessly.

"Betcher yer life it's the best thing yer can do. Now yer hear me warble!" put in Munch Jones.

Sol moved threateningly, and Munch jumped back, but pretended that he did it accidentally.

"Yer know, Sol, thar's nothin' ag'in' yer 'cept s'picion, an' ef it turns out ez you're a good squar' man, why, Jim Swan will be ther first ter shake hands with yer when things is straightened out," added Swan.

But Sol did not answer. He saw that he was beaten, and he was not in the humor to discuss the situation with anybody.

"Now yer hev me, what are yer goin' ter do with me?" he growled after a pause, during which none of the others relaxed their vigilance for an instant.

"Wal, I'll tell yer, Sol. We are goin' ter take yer back to town with us, ez soon ez we see about Hey Rube. I guess there's nothing of him to care fer 'cept his remains. Howsoever, we won't leave him sticking in that hole, ef he is dead. It ain't nat'ral like," observed Jim Swan, reflectively.

"Humph!" growled Sol.

"I begs yer pardon, what did yer please ter remark?" put in Bud.

"Nothin', to you."

"Oh, well, yer needn't be so blooming perlite to a cove; it might strike in an' make yer sick," retorted Bud, with a threatening wave of his revolver.

"Yer see, Sol," said Swan, "ez one of ther circus police, I allers carry little conveniences with me. So, ef everybody will keep him kivered, I'll put these on an' make him comfortable."

Swan exhibited a pair of heavy handcuffs, and the shadow of a smile flickered across Sol Fixer's face.

The smile was not lost on Jim Swan.

"Yes, that thar's all right, Sol, but I guess I'll fool you," he muttered inaudibly. Then aloud: "Munch, just step around thar an' go through his pockets."

Sol started, and moved his hands in the direction of his pockets.

"Hold on, cully. Don't yer try no monkey business in dis here crowd. You hear me," exclaimed Munch, with his toughest manner, as he pushed the muzzle of his pistol a little closer to Fixer's face.

Sol's hands went up over his head again. He saw that he was helpless.

Munch strolled around the counter, and telling the others to keep their revolvers ready for instant action, went through Sol Fixer's pockets.

A handy-billy, a bowie-knife and a bull-dog six-shooter were the result of the examination.

Munch put all the weapons in his own pockets and looked toward Jim Swan for further orders.

Swan quickly clapped the handcuffs upon the prisoner's wrists, and Munch Jones stepped close to him and grinned maliciously in his face.

It was an unwise proceeding on the part of Mr. Jones, for Sol, with an oath, raised his two hands and brought the ponderous handcuffs down upon the young man's shoulders with such force as to nearly fell him to the floor. If Munch had not been active enough to move his head suddenly aside, the chances are that his skull would have been fractured.

"Sol, you're er fool," said Jim Swan with a frown, as he took a small key that hung to his steel watch-chain, and unlocked the handcuffs.

"You're not a-goin' to let the blooming rascal go, are you?" asked Bud, in the greatest surprise.

Swan's answer was to force Sol Fixer's hands behind and handcuff them in that position.

"Curse yer I'll make it hot fer all uv yer when we git back ter ther show. This is er durned outrage. What have I done?"

"Done? Ill soon tell yer," said Bud. "We caught yer tryin' to keep there gals in er cellar, an' it's through you that Hey Rube is killed, and you had something to do with stealing all that blooming jewelry. You're a pretty cove, to ask what you've done. Wait till you git afore the beak, then you will be told before the whole blooming court what you've done! Oh, crikey! What have you done?"

Bud's enjoyment of the absurdity of the question was so intense that he waved his pistol around his head in a way that threatened the life of every one in the room.

"Come hyar," commanded Swan, as he led Sol out of the room by the shoulder.

Taking him outside of the house, he walked him over to the swing. Attached to it was a stout chain, used sometimes to fasten the swing so that it could not be used by visitors whose behavior was too rough to make them desirable company. This chain hung to the strong iron staple that held it to the upright pole of the swing, and the Yale padlock, with the key in it, lay on the ground.

Defly, Jim Swan twisted the chain trice around Sol Fixer's handcuffs and in an instant had him padlocked tightly to the pole, with his back to it, so that he could not possibly release himself, even if he had a key. He hadn't a key, however, for the one belonging to the Yale lock was safe in Jim Swan's pocket.

"Jim," said a faint voice, as Swan turned away from his captive and walked toward the house.

"Rube!" he cried, in mingled joy and surprise.

"Yes."

The voice was feeble but it was undoubtedly that of Hey Rube.

Swan hastened to the spot where he supposed the detective's dead body lay under the pile of masonry with his five companions close behind him.

Mlle. Rosa and Alice had, with the natural timidity of women, felt as if they could not go to the place as long as they believed Hey Rube dead. Now, they experienced a thrill of hope that they had believed was impossible in connection with their noble defender.

A hasty examination by Swan of the detective's position resulted in his commanding Bud and Jones to force some of the big stones that lay around into a space by the side of Reuben, to serve as a support for the mass of stone work that pinioned him down.

The whole weight of the wall was not upon the detective as they had supposed. An iron beam, placed in the wall to keep it straight had fallen across his body, and, while making it impossible for him to move, acted as a prop for the fearful weight that would otherwise have crushed out his life.

The stones were pushed in under the iron, and by dint of hard work, and some little knowledge of engineering, the space in which Rube lay was gradually enlarged, until he could be pulled forth.

He was insensible, having in fact been so ever since the wall fell save for the few seconds when he had called to Jim Swan.

"Poor cove!" exclaimed Buddicombe, in a voice of extreme pity, as they laid him on the ground outside the hole. "Any one got some brandy, or something?"

Munch Jones with the air of importance that was usual with him, produced from his pocket a small bottle of liquor, and, as Rube showed

signs of returning consciousness, poured some down his throat.

For ten minutes they all devoted their energies toward restoring the detective, and with such good effect that at the end of that time his iron constitution vindicated itself, and he was able to stand up and declare that he was all right again.

He was yet trying to collect his scattered faculties, when a scream from Mlle. Rosa made him turn quickly and look toward the house.

The whole party had moved toward the river, for the sake of getting water conveniently to bathe the detective's forehead, and no one had noticed that Mlle. Rosa had for a moment gone back to the house. She had seen Rube's hat lying near the hole, among the dust and stones, and had gone to fetch it.

"Well, blow me tight, if that blooming Mexican ain't up to his larks again! I never see such a cove," exclaimed Bud, as he felt for his pistol.

"*Caramba!* I fool you yet," was the response of Sondaz.

In the bustle and excitement of getting Rube from his dangerous position, and restoring him, no one had thought of the Mexican. That astute gentleman had not been slow to take advantage of this state of things. He saw the hole there giving him an easy avenue of escape from the cellar, and though it was rather more dangerous than he liked, he saw that it was his only means of escape.

He slipped through the hole, and the first thing he saw outside was Mlle. Rosa.

Like a hawk he pounced upon her and dragged her in the direction of the swing.

It was at this moment that the girl's friends saw the maneuver and started in pursuit.

CHAPTER XVI.

A STERN CHASE AND AN ESCAPE.

SIMULTANEOUSLY with the recognition of the Mexican and Mlle. Rosa's danger, half a dozen pistols were pointed at the miscreant's head.

"Ah! *Caramba!* You fire, eh? Vell, fire away! Ha, ha! I laugh at you!"

Sondaz put the girl between himself and the others, and they all stopped in horror as they saw how helpless they were. A shot fired at the Mexican would be almost sure to hit Mlle. Rosa.

"Sol!" yelled Sondaz, as he passed Fixer, and plunged into the thick woods that skirted the river on the American side.

It was almost broad daylight now, but in the shadow of the trees and shrubbery it would be possible to get quite out of sight of his pursuers.

"Look out, Munch!" warned Bud, seeing that Sondaz was pointing directly at Jones's head with a pistol.

Munch dropped, and the ball whistled over his head.

"Fooled him that time, Munch," observed Jim Swan, with a stern smile of approval. "Get up and follow him, and you shall soon hev your revenge!"

"Revenge! Wal, now, I don't want no revenge. I only want to keep out of it. Dis ain't my funeral, I want yer to understand," grumbled Munch, as he remained on the ground, watching the others chasing the Mexican and his captive into the wood.

A noise close to his elbow startled him, and the next minute he was lying on his face, while some one knelt on his back.

"You make a noise an' I'll brain yer right hyar! You know me, and you can say whether I'm likely to do what I say," hissed a voice in his ear.

"Sol Fixer!" gasped Jones, in utter astonishment.

"Don't speak so loud, d'ye hear?" and a set of very hard knuckles digging into the back of his neck emphasized the query.

Then, as Munch Jones lay helpless, Fixer went through his pockets. The first thing he found was the nearly empty bottle of brandy. This he finished with much gusto. Then he took Munch's pistol, bowie-knife, and a short, black-snake whip that was the owner's especial pride, and that he always carried coiled around his waist under his clothes when he was not at work among the animals or the menagerie attached to the circus.

"Good! Now I'm as well fixed as ever," observed Sol, as he stood up, and thoughtfully bestowed upon Munch a slight kick.

The Mexican and the others were all out of sight now.

"Now, Munch, I don't just know what to do with you," he said. "I wish I hed ther key of them thar handcuffs. But I hev'n't. I jist slipped 'em off myself, but I can't put 'em on you ther same way, especially with them great big paws of yours."

He thought for a minute and then said:

"Come hyar. I kin fix yer."

He dragged Munch to the swing, giving him an occasional cut with the whip to hasten his steps. Then he backed him up to the pole where the chain and handcuffs were yet hanging, and taking his blue silk handkerchief, tied Munch's wrists and fastened him to the chain in a securely scientific way that precluded any escape from the prisoner until he was released by some one else.

Then he stepped back and surveyed his work with the greatest of complacency, Munch Jones not having a word to say in his discomfiture.

Sol went down to the river and examined his skiff, with the momentary intention of leaving the Mexican to his fate and going back to the circus. He had not abducted the girls or stolen the jewels, or done anything except resist the attack upon him by Swan and the others. They might make it hot for Sondaz, if they caught him, he argued, but Fixer was an innocent individual who had done nothing wrong.

"And yet," he muttered, "I don't like to give this thing up now that it has gone so far. If Sondaz kin fix thet scheme with Rosa, it will be a fortune fer me. Besides, thar's them jewels. Durn his yellow hide! I b'lieve he bez 'em all safe, in spite o' them thar squeals of his. No, I'll see it through, if I hang fer it."

Without even a look in the direction of Munch who, tied up as he was, was endeavoring to look tough, as usual, he hastened up the shore and marched to the thicket, in the footsteps of his late companions, who supposed that they had left him a prisoner.

The rank undergrowth was trodden down in a straight line parallel with the river, and Sol had no difficulty in following the trail.

The great trees spreading overhead shut out the light so effectually that it was hard to believe the sun had risen and was glinting over the river in all the glory of a summer morn.

The wind had gone down, but its effect was still apparent in the long swell of the water, which had not yet settled itself into its normal condition of murmuring placidity.

For what seemed to Sol Fixer several miles, but was in reality only a few hundred yards, he followed the trail without catching up with the others.

"If I don't see some one soon, I'll go back," he muttered. "I don't want to lay around hyar all day. At the same time I might help the Mexican out uv a hole ef he gits inter er squabble with ther crowd. It's ter my interest ter do thet now. Once we git our business all settled up, though, an' I'll teach Sondaz something ez he won't forgit all his life."

"Sh!" whispered a voice almost at his elbow in the thick wood.

"Hallo!" he replied, cautiously.

"Come here wiz me. *Caramba!* We'll fool zis crowd yet. Come."

"Whar in thunder are yer? I'll come ef I know whar yer are," answered Sol.

There was a rustle among the bushes and the Mexican's swarthy face showed itself.

"Zis is me. You know me, eh?"

"Yes, I know yer. I'd know yer any place," was Sol's gruff response, as he pushed the bushes aside and found Sondaz standing in a little clearing that extended to the river's edge.

"Good! Come wiz me."

The Mexican strode down the clearing, and reached the spot where the sail-boat in which Munch Jones, Bud, Swan and Tim had made their way to Belle Isle, lay moored against a landing that extended far out into the river.

"Oho! What hev yer got hyar?" asked Fixer, with a grin. "Thet's er daisy."

"You think so, eh? Vell, so do I. An' see. Mademoiselle Rosa. I haf her, too!"

Following the direction of Sondaz's finger, he saw Rosa lying on the bottom of the boat, wrapped in her water-proof cloak, which had been covered over her face.

"She's very quiet. What hev yer done to her?"

"I put a piece of stick in her mouth, so she will not talk because she cannot. I will take it out when ve start," explained the Mexican, in a matter-of-fact way.

He sprung into the boat as he spoke, and while his back was turned Sol seized the opportunity to shake his fist threateningly at him.

The Mexican's vision seemed to be supernatural, for he observed, coolly, without looking at Fixer:

"Ah! You not like me, eh? Why not let ze by-gones be by-gones? It better, eh?"

"I don't know what ye'r talking about," returned Sol, sullenly, "but I think we'd better git away from hyar afore ther crowd finds us. You're playing a dangerous game, Fernando, an' you might find ez the law is rayther stricter here than it is in Mexico or in Deadwood in the old days!"

"*Caramba!* You're right zis time. Throw off ze line at ze bow, while I hoist ze mainsail. So! Now, up wiz ze jib!"

Both the Mexican and Fixer were used to the management of sails, and very soon the light craft was scudding down before a gentle breeze from the southeast that had taken the place of the fierce norther of a few hours before.

They reached the point of the island, and, standing off the headland, looked back to see if any of the other party were in sight.

"*Caramba!* Zey are all down in front of ze house. See. Zey are doing something wiz zat fool, zat—what you call?—Munch!"

"You're right, Sondaz. They are takin' off thet silk handkerchief of mine. I hated ter leave it thar tied round thet skunk's wrists, but I couldn't fix him no other way."

Mlle. Rosa, who had remained quietly in the

bottom of the boat during the embarkation of her captors, now struggled into a sitting posture and, before the Mexican could prevent her, waved her white handkerchief vigorously to her friends on the island.

"*Caramba!* What you do?" exclaimed Sondaz, savagely, as he pulled her down with no gentle hand, snatching the handkerchief from her at the same time.

But Hey Rube had distinguished the form of Rosa, and nothing could have held him back now. Springing into the light skiff in which Rosa had reached the isle, he seized the oars and shoved off, but not before Tim Trevilyan had also got into the boat and taken the rudder-ropes in his hands.

"Look out there, you coves. Them fellers have my blooming drum aboard that sail-boat," yelled Buddicombe, as he dashed down to the dock and, with Alice Trevilyan, and Jim Swan, embarked in the skiff in which Hey Rube and Alice had come.

"Say, now. You think you're smart, don't yer," cried a disconsolate voice, as they got into deep water under the united efforts of Bud and Swan at the oars.

"Wal, ef we ain't forgot Munch, I'm er fish," said Swan, with a grin. "He's allers in trouble."

"Poor fellow! It's a shame," added Alice, with womanly sympathy.

"Oh, he's all right. There's another blooming boat over there," laughed Bud, as he made desperate signs to Munch.

They saw Munch look around until his gaze fell upon the Mexican's boat, hauled high up on the shore. Then, with a swagger, he strolled over to it, and with great dignity and deliberation got it down to the water and rowed after the others.

The boats were now in the following order: The sail-boat upon whose stern her name, "The Petrel," now shone in gilt letters in the sun, was ahead and was making good time down the river, hugging the American shore on the right as much as possible without losing the wind; behind her, rowing like a madman, was Hey Rube, with Tim Trevilyan steering carefully so as to give all the assistance in his power to his companion. Some distance behind, Bud and Jim Swan were laying to their oars, while Alice handled the tiller like an old sailor. Last of all was Munch, in solitary glory, tugging along, with much splashing and very little breath, for he was an indifferent oarsman, and used about four times as much exertion as was necessary.

The voyagers had the advantage of the current in going down the river, and it was soon evident to Hey Rube that he could not hope to overhaul the Petrel before she reached the city, by a mere stern chase.

Rosa was no longer in sight, the Mexican having compelled her to lie in the bottom of the boat. This gave the detective an idea.

"Halloa, there!" he yelled.

"Wal, what's ther matter?" returned Sol.

"Where are you goin'?" queried Rube.

"Whar d'ye think? We've been out for a little pleasure sail, that's all."

"If you don't stop, I'll put a bullet into you," thundered Rube, nearly beside himself with rage.

"*Caramba!* You do an' I put ze bullet into you, too," retorted Sondaz, waving a revolver.

"True!" muttered Rube. "It wouldn't do. The scoundrel would not care what happened if things got desperate. A bullet hole in this little shell of ours would sink us at once. I'm a fool to lose my temper."

"Let me blaze away at him once," requested Tim, who had been quietly listening to the colloquy. "I should like to plug Sol Fixer once for the mean way he has always treated me."

"No, Tim. Keep quiet. We'll catch them yet. Once on shore, and we shall have all the help we want. I'll engage to have that Mexican under lock and key before sundown. It is nearly six o'clock now. Just keep the boat straight, and we shall be all right."

Munch was now a very long way behind, but Bud and Swan had pulled up nearly level with Hey Rube's boat.

"I hope they ain't a-hurting that blooming drum of mine," said Bud, anxiously. "I put it in the boat because I would not trust it out of my sight, an' now there's no one to look after it but that Greaser and Sol. Fixer never had no idea of the way to use musical instruments, no-how. Likely as not they've let it get wet, and I may have to get a new head for it afore I can play it with any kind of expression."

At the thought of possible injury to his beloved drum, Bud put more vigor into the stroke of his oar, and soon the two boats were side by side.

"I'll take care the drum is not hurt, Bud," said Hey Rube, soothingly. "But just keep up this speed, and spread out a little more toward the Canadian side. Look out, there!"

The last sentence was in reference to one of the big steamboats that ply between Canada and Detroit for the purpose of conveying railroad cars from one side of the river to the other. They are used in many parts of the country, notably between New York and Jersey City, and are familiar to most Americans.

One of these boats now shot out from the

great freight depot of the Detroit & Milwaukee Railroad, whence, it will be remembered that Budworth Buddicombe and his companions set sail for Belle Isle a few hours before, in the Petrel, which was now in the possession of Fernando Sondaz and Sol Fixer.

The Petrel had passed the big steamboat before it got into mid-stream, and the latter was now between the sail-boat and her pursuers.

"Look out, Tim. Keep her head to the swell, or we shall be swamped," cautioned Hey Rube, for the waves from the steamboat were not to be despised by the occupants of a cockle-shell such as that in which sat the detective and his youthful companion.

There was confusion for some minutes before the steamer got properly into its course for the other side of the river, and when the great paddle-wheels had done turning backward and forward, with the creaking and groaning that always accompanies such proceedings, there was time for the Petrel to have gained considerable headway.

"Where is she?" exclaimed Hey Rube, involuntarily, as he eagerly scanned the surface of the water.

There were a great many craft on the river now, and the ferry-boats between Detroit and the Canadian town of Windsor opposite, were running to and fro, and helping to obstruct the view.

"Where the deuce are they? The blooming river must have swallowed them all up, boat and all. And my drum!"

Bud said the last three words in such pitiful tones that Alice could hardly help laughing, but she forbore when she saw how really distressed he was.

Not a vestige of the Petrel could be seen, and Hey Rube had just made up his mind that she must be hidden on the other side of the big steamboat, when a fierce "*Caramba!*" behind him on the right made him turn quickly.

"There they are, Rube!" cried Tim, in an ecstasy of excitement.

The Petrel had run into her dock by the side of the railroad freight wharf, and just as the detective realized this fact, he saw Sol Fixer disappear around the corner of the freight-shed with a figure in a long water-proof cloak in his arms.

"By heavens! She is unconscious, and he is taking her Heaven knows where!" shrieked Hey Rube, as he rowed toward the dock so vigorously that the long ash oars bent dangerously under the strain.

"Yes, and blow me tight, if they haven't lost my big drum!" added Budworth Buddicombe, with a groan, as he, too, hastened toward the Petrel.

CHAPTER XVII.

SOL FIXER'S NEMESIS.

HALF an hour later Sol Fixer appeared among the circus-men, who, on a mile track, just outside the city of Detroit, were sitting on their special freight-cars waiting for the engine that was to take them to Monroe, the next place of exhibition.

The escape of the tiger and the breaking down of the wagon, had prevented the cars being attached to the regular train, and the whole circus property had been compelled to remain on the siding until now—nearly seven o'clock.

With the exception of a certain heaviness about the eyes, the result of loss of sleep, and which was to be observed in nearly every one connected with the show, there were no signs in him that he had passed through a most exciting four hours since he had left the circus-grounds on Grand River avenue.

The men had missed him, but they knew his humor too well to trouble him with questions. So when he asked when the train would move they answered him briefly, but respectfully, that it would go in a few minutes, and then said no more.

He walked along the train, looked at the animal cages, which were carefully wedged into place upon the flat cars; saw that the tent-poles, canvas, etc., were all packed properly; peeped into the sleeping car of the tent-men, where those who were not called upon to watch matters during the journey had been asleep for hours; and then stepped into his own private cabin at the end of the tent-men's sleeper.

He touched an electric bell, and a colored man, in a white linen cap and apron, stepped into the little compartment.

"Wash."

"Yes, sah!"

"Got er cup uv coffee?"

"Yes, sah. All ready smoking hot, sah. Like some breakfuss, Mistah Fixah?"

"Yes."

"All right, sah. Direckly, sah."

The colored man, who was the regular cook for the principal tent-men and for such of the performers as slept on the train, went to his cooking caboose on the next car, and in a few minutes returned with a comfortable meal of coffee, eggs, ham and toast that was especially welcome to Sol after the rough-and-tumble times he had had on Belle Isle since two o'clock.

Wash (his full name was Washington Culpepper) hovered about the table, after the man-

ner of all colored waiters, to make sure that Mr. Fixer had got everything that a gentleman of proper principles should require for breakfast, and was standing back to admire the general effect with an artist's eye, when Sol Fixer remarked carelessly:

"I expect Jim Swan, Reuben Rocket, Tim Trevilyan and Munch Jones will be hyar directly. When they come send them to me, I want to speak ter them."

"Yes, sah. Anything else?"

"Nothing else."

"All right, sah. You can tech the bell, sah, when you want me again, sah."

"I know."

"Yes, sah."

There was no occasion for all these remarks on the part of Washington Culpepper, but he did not consider it professional to leave the cabin until he had talked as much as the circumstances would possibly allow. Now, that he had no excuse for saying anything more, he gracefully retired, to Sol Fixer's great relief.

The ringmaster grinned as he found himself alone. An idea that was passing through his brain pleased him.

"Ha! ha! They'll be kinder surprised when they see me hyar. But, don't you forgit it, Hey Rube. When you git ther drop on Sol Fixer it won't be when he hez warning aforehand. Not by a darned sight."

He drank a draught of coffee and swallowed some toast mechanically, as his thoughts went busily along and made him oblivious of what was actually passing around him.

"Thar's not a thing ag'in' me; I hev'n't done nothin' that they can ketch me on, an' ez fer Hey Rube! Curse him! Ef he tries any monkey business on me, why, he'll never see the gal ag'in, an' I'll find some way o' meetin' him whar ther police ain't got quite so much power ez they hev hyar in ther East. I know places in ther Rockies, whar this very show will be in a few weeks, whar it will be man ter man, and whar ther gun or ther knife kin soon settle a difference of opinion in ther good old-fashioned way with no police about it."

He unlocked a little cupboard just over his head and took out a six-shooter, which he carefully emptied of its cartridges and filled with new ones. Then he put the weapon in the right pocket of his sack coat and went on with his breakfast.

There was a grim look of determination on his rugged face as he ate that was not pleasant to see and that would have put Hey Rube doubly on his guard had he been able to observe it.

A jolt that made the cup and dishes jingle on his table warned Sol Fixer that the train would soon start on its journey toward Monroe.

He went to the window and looked out.

"They ain't a-coming yit. Funny, too. They was only jist behind when I slid around ther corner uv that thar freight shed, an' they might ha suspected ez I'd come in this hyar direction seems ter me," he muttered.

All was bustle on the railroad. The engine had backed down to the train, causing the jolt referred to, and was now coupled.

"All aboard!" shouted the conductor, and the tent and railroad men who had been running up and down the tracks to see that everything was secured, now sprung upon the platforms, and the train moved out of the siding on its trip to Monroe.

Sol Fixer sat at the window, watching the houses and fences as the engine reached its full speed. Suddenly he jumped to his feet, and waved his hand out of the window.

Standing on the track, and gazing at him with expressions of blank astonishment, were Budworth Buddicombe and Munch Jones.

Two hours later, the circus property was being unloaded at Monroe, a pretty town about twenty-eight miles west of Detroit, and Sol Fixer was directing operations in his usual business-like manner.

"Hurry up, thar, boys! It's time we were out on ther parade. Ther people are all standing about on ther streets, an' thar'll be er riot of we don't make some purtense uv er procession," he said, cheerily, as he occasionally lent a hand in lifting some heavy object, or directed the disposal of a wagon or big trunk.

As is the custom of circuses, there was to be a parade of the riders, animal cages, band-wagons, elephants, etc., through the principal thoroughfares of the city.

In consequence of the break-down, the Great Astronomic Circus and Menagerie would not be able to start as promptly as usual, but it would do the best it could under the circumstances.

The tent-men, who would not have to ride in the procession, were busy driving the toe-stakes into the soft turf in a large field near the city limits, and the immense folds of the big tent were all ready to be hauled into place as soon as the gigantic center-pole was erected, and secured by the powerful braces.

It was a glorious morning, and the gay costumes of the riders, male and female, the gaudy paintings on the animal cages, the gilding and ornamentation on the band-wagon, and the air of bustle and animation of the whole scene, were most inspiring, in the strongest contrast to the

gloomy island upon which Sol Fixer had spent the early morning hours.

"Git inter line thar!" he bawled, to some of the laborers, who, gorgeously attired in red coats, top-boots, and jockey-caps, were mounting their horses.

There was a great commotion, and the line gradually formed itself, ready for the start.

"Whar's ther band?"

"Here we are, sir, but we ain't got no base-drum," said the leader of the band, a very tall, thin fellow, with an abnormally red nose, as, holding a silver cornet, he stepped deferentially to Fixer's side.

"Curse ther big drum! Play without it."

"All right, sir, if you say so," meekly replied the thin man, adding to himself: "If ther boss said we was to play without instruments at all, I suppose we'd have to do it."

He threw his long legs up the side of the band wagon, and took his place just behind the driver.

"Vere's der peeg trum?" asked the bassoon player, from beneath a mustache that completely covered his mouth, and made one wonder how he ever managed to get his instrument to his lips.

"There ain't no big drum. We've got to play without it," replied the leader, curtly.

"Shiminy. Ve not get der moosic oudt widout ze trum," grumbled the other.

"Well, we've got to do it somehow or other."

At this moment, Sol Fixer, seated on a magnificent black horse, gave the signal for the start. The leader waved his cornet, and, putting it to his lips, commenced a march, just as the procession moved.

The other musicians, (stolid German fellows, who only wanted to earn their salaries,) tooted away on their horns and flutes, regardless of everything but the notes in the books before them.

The long line of equestrians and equestriennes, followed the band-wagon, and preceded the animal-cages, in which were occasional breaks, where a wagon of marionettes, or a small donkey cart driven by a clown drew the particular attention of the onlookers.

"Hallo, there, yer blooming chumps! Stop that procession. D'ye hear me? What are you coves a-doing, trying to play a march without a base drum. I never heard tell of such a thing. Stop! D'ye hear what I say?"

There was no mistaking that voice. It was that of Budworth Buddicombe, and the gentleman himself stood in the middle of the road, with his base drum by his side, defying the whole universe, as it were.

At a signal from Sol, the procession stopped, and he rode forward toward Bud.

"Why warn't yer in yer place? You are fined a dollar for being late," said Sol, sternly.

Bud's mouth opened wide in his astonishment at the others brazen effrontery.

"Well, but—" he stammered.

"Git up in that thar wagon and 'tend to yer business," interrupted Sol, "and, mind, I'll take that dollar fine out of yer salary."

"But—my drum!"

"Yer hev yer drum, hev'n't yer?"

"Yes, but—I—you—I—"

"Drive on, thar," broke in Fixer impatiently.

"He's drunk, and if he isn't sober enough to tend the afternoon show, I'll discharge him, altogether. I will, by thunder!"

Bud staggered for a second, and then, with an air of not caring whether school kept or not, climbed up into the band-wagon, and took from his drum the waterproof cloak of Mademoiselle Rosa.

When he reached the sail-boat, "The Patrol," on the river, after the Mexican and Sol Fixer had left it, he found that his drum had been removed. He did not see it again until he reached Monroe, when his instinct told him that his beloved instrument was concealed under the waterproof cloak that he saw lying over something amid a heap of baggage in the corner of the circus grounds.

The procession went on, Bud pounding away at his drum almost mechanically as he tried to convince himself that all the proceedings on Belle Isle were not part of a dream from which he had now only half awakened.

Sol Fixer, riding ahead on his black horse, looked to neither the right or left. Whatever was passing his mind, there was nothing in his face to show that he was not perfectly at ease. He might have been quietly asleep since he left the grounds on Grand River avenue, Detroit, for any disturbance that could be discovered in his demeanor, although his heavy eyes, as remarked before, betokened weariness from loss of rest.

The circuit of the town had been nearly concluded, the march being as triumphal in its character as circus parades usually are, with crowds of men, women and children lining the route, and with a general gala atmosphere overspreading everything.

The procession had stopped for an instant to allow the spectators to admire its beauties while motionless, when suddenly there was confusion in the thickest of the crowd, and a young lad, followed by a stout, powerful-looking man,

sprung at the bridle of Sol Fixer's horse, and, with the agility of a monkey, stood upon the saddle behind him, while pulling him back with an arm around his neck.

The attack was so unexpected that Sol had a narrow escape from rolling head-first into the mud. He recovered himself with a mighty effort, however, and would have hurled the boy from him had not the stout man interfered.

"Hold on, thar, Sol! Don't hurt that thar boy, or I'll shoot yer down like er dog!" he yelled, as he seized the bridle with his right hand and Sol's wrist with his left, in an iron grip.

"Curse you, Jim Swan! I'll make it hot for you!" hissed Fixer.

"Cert'inly you will, when yer git er chance, but not this trip," was the taunting reply. "Come down, Tim. He's goin' ter ther tent, anyhow, and we will settle with him thar."

CHAPTER XVIII.

AT THE INDIA-RUBBER HOUSE.

THE reader will easily understand how Sol Fixer managed to fool his pursuers on the dock of the Detroit & Milwaukee Railroad Freight Depot. They saw him carrying something wrapped in the waterproof cloak of Mlle. Rosa, and, with the hasty glimpse they had, took it for granted that Sol was carrying the unconscious form of the girl.

But he wasn't. It was nothing more or less than Bud's big drum that was enveloped in the cloak, and when the friends of Rosa got up to the dock one by one, she was within a few yards of them, in the deadly grasp of Fernando Sondaz, the Mexican.

A small door in the boat-house was unlocked, being secured only by a latch, and by this means the Mexican had gained the interior of the shed, and, hiding behind a pile of sails, which with oars, masts, etc., nearly filled the space that was not occupied by water in the center, waited for developments.

His hand was over Rosa's mouth as he whispered fiercely into her ear:

"Caramba! You make noise and I keel you! So!"

He flashed his dirk before her, and letting it slip up his sleeve, with the sharp point protruding, kept his evil eye upon her with an expression that told how thoroughly he was in earnest.

He heard the controversy between Bud, Tim, Swan and Alice, and saw them go around the freight shed in pursuit of Sol, and a few minutes later grinned as Munch Jones paddled up, and with a great deal of "toughness," secured his boat with the others and also went away around the freight shed.

"Now, Rosa, ma wife! Ve can come out. So!" he said, with a triumphant snarl, that showed his cruel teeth to the gums, and emphasized his general resemblance to a wild beast.

He walked through the boat-house, holding her by the hand, and unbolting the door opposite the river, found himself in a yard, from which a latched gate gave egress to Atwater street.

"Now, Rosa, you ma wife, eh?"

The girl shuddered. She was completely worn out by her night's experience, and was not disposed to argue any longer. She simply bowed her head.

"You make noise on street, eh?"

"And if I did?"

"Zen I will kill you! So!"

The vindictive snarl with which he said this indicated that the will to do it was there, even if he failed to carry it out.

"I do not fear you," replied Mlle. Rosa, quietly.

"You not fear me, eh? Zen I will show you."

"Caramba! I make you fear me!"

The girl smiled carelessly.

"Fernando Sondaz, I have but to raise my voice now, and a dozen people would come to my assistance. Men are already at work in the freight sheds, and nothing but a wall divides them from us."

"But you vill not raise ze voice. No! You vill not do it," sneered Sondaz.

"Why?"

"Because it would not pay you. So!"

"Why?"

"Because I am going to release you from your marriage with me when you come to ze boarding-house, where ve can talk, eh?"

"You mean that I am to buy you off from claiming me as your wife, when you know that I am not your wife, and never was."

Sondaz shrugged his shoulders.

"You vas not married to me in Vera Cruz, eh?"

"I was a foolish young girl, and I did not know then that you were a criminal."

"Caramba! Zis is foolish talk. Vill you come vith me to ze boarding-house—ze—ze—India-rubber house? Ha, ha! Zey call it ze India-rubber house because it is always full of ze boarders, and yet zere is always room for von more. Ha, ha! You come, eh?"

"Why should I go there? Could we not go to a hotel, where there is more convenience? There is the Russell House—"

"Vell, you see, my dear Mademoiselle Rosa—"

or rather, Madame Sondaz—I do not want to make myself too prominent in the city. I not friends with every one in Detroit, and I would rather ve settle our beesness at ze India-rubber house. Ze lady is friend of mine, and we can have ze parlor to ourself while ve arrange our mattar. So!"

"I will go."

"Zanks! Zat is so very good of you!"

He bowed low with mocking politeness, and opening the little latched gate, made way for her to pass first, and followed her to the street.

A walk of ten minutes brought them to the place that Sondaz had spoken of as the India-rubber house.

It was an old frame building, containing many rooms, though having only two floors. A spacious veranda extended along the whole front, upon which opened the long parlor windows. The house was situated on Randolph street, facing Monroe avenue, a wide thoroughfare that ended at the Campus Martius and City Hall.

Fifteen years ago the India-rubber boarding-house was one of the well-known features of Detroit. It was removed some years since to make room for the new Odd-Fellows' Hall, which now occupies the site.

Sondaz walked into the house through the open doorway with the air of a man thoroughly at home, and ushered his companion into the parlor.

The landlady came forward and bade him good-morning. He was evidently an old boarder.

"Can we have some breakfast, Miss Priest?"

"Certainly, Mr. Samson," was the ready reply. "Step into the dining-room. It is ready now."

"Zanks. Zis is ma seester, Mlle. Rosa. Ve go to Chicago zis afternoon," said Sondaz.

He escorted Rosa into the dining-room, whispering to her as they passed along the hall: "My name is Mr. Samson here."

Breakfast disposed of, the kind-hearted landlady took the tired girl to her own bedroom, where, after washing her hands and face, she felt more like herself, and better fitted to undergo the ordeal of an interview with the wily Mexican.

Having arranged with Miss Priest for the undisturbed possession of the parlor for an hour or so, Sondaz drew a table to one of the windows, where the wisteria climbing over the veranda, partly shaded them from the observation of passers-by, and having placed a chair for Rosa on one side of the table, seated himself in another opposite.

"Now, Rosa, vat you going to do about zat paper?"

"The paper that you wanted me to sign?"

"Yes."

"It was torn up by Hey Rube; you know that," answered the girl. Now that she was face to face with Sondaz alone, she felt as if she must gain time somehow.

"Yes, but I haf ze other one. I always make sure. So! See, here is ze duplicate."

He took from an inner pocket a paper, an exact copy of that which had been snatched away by Hey Rube on the island just as Mlle. Rosa was about to sign.

The girl took it and read it slowly throughout. Then, looking straight into the baleful eyes of the Mexican, she said:

"Fernando Sondaz, do you not know that the marriage in Vera Cruz was not legal; that you wanted to secure the property that you thought I possessed, and that you tried to make me believe I was your wife that you might get it into your clutches? What witness was there to the ceremony that was interrupted by your arrest?"

The Mexican smiled.

"Ze marriage was legal, and Sol Fixer was ez witness. Anything more?"

"What do you want me to do?"

"Sign this paper. It makes over to me \$200,000, and I go away, so you can get ze divorce and be free. You rich woman now. You not want poor match of husband like Sondaz. No! You vill sign, eh?"

He was putting the paper closer to her, and had drawn forth a fountain pen, which he placed in her hand, watching her closely from the corner of his eye the while.

"There are no witnesses," she said.

For answer Sondaz went to the door, and called:

"Miss Priest."

The landlady came at once.

"Miss Priest, I want you to witness zis lady's signature to zis paper, eh?"

"Very well."

Miss Priest was of an accommodating disposition, and was always ready to oblige her boarders in anything reasonable. Witnessing a signature struck her as something with a legal flavor about it that was creditable to every one concerned in the transaction.

Rosa read the paper through again, and then, in sheer desperation, for she felt that she must rid herself of this fiend at any cost, signed: "Rosa."

Then she hesitated.

"What name must I put?" she murmured, more to herself than to the Mexican.

But Sondaz caught the words and replied, quickly.

"Sondaz, of course."

Now that he was so near the consummation of his plot he trembled like a leaf, and his thick lips became blue-white in his anxiety.

He took his tobacco and cigarette paper from his pocket and rolled a cigarette, while Rosa held the pen in her hand, hesitating to add the hated word "Sondaz" to the "Rosa" that she had already written.

"You pardon me if I smoke?" he asked, with his labored politeness.

"Yes."

"Zanks."

He puffed slowly and allowed the blue smoke to curl from his nose as he watched Rosa, with the pen in her hand, apparently in a reverie.

"Madame Rosa, Miss Priest ees waiting," he said, softly.

The landlady was indeed getting fidgety. She had a large house and many boarders, and they would be clamorous for their dinner at noon. She could not afford to spend much time in the parlor.

The girl started, and then, with an air of desperation, wrote "Sondaz" and threw down the pen.

The Mexican took it up and wrote his name in a scrawl that the good Miss Priest could not decipher for her life. It might have been either "Sondaz" or "Samoon" for anything she could tell.

The writing of her own name was a very serious matter to her, and there was a great deal of fuss and squaring of elbows before she managed to get a large "Jane Priest" into the place on the paper marked by Fernando Sondaz.

It was all done at last, however, and Miss Priest having been politely bowed out of the parlor, the Mexican took up the paper with a gleam of triumph, folded it and put it into his pocket.

He was so occupied with the paper and with looking at Rosa as he did so that he did not notice a small, puffy man, who opened the door softly and strode across the room to a small table in the corner, in a business-like manner. Upon the table was a queer-looking machine like a musical box with a trumpet sticking out. The little man poked about this machine, and touching a spring, set a cylinder in the interior in motion, which gave forth a click occasionally, like that of a drunken clock.

He was perhaps a minute at this table before he saw that he was not alone in the room. He was evidently about to apologize, but realizing that the others were unconscious of his presence, he stole quietly from the room again, without recognizing either Mlle. Rosa or the Mexican.

"Now that you have settled this matter, I may go, I suppose," said the girl. "The circus has got to Monroe by this time, and I shall finish the season with it in spite of my Detroit property."

"As you please. I shall put zis paper in ze hands of my lawyer at once. Zen you can get ze divorce, and I vill get ma money."

"How soon can it be done?" asked the girl, rising. She wanted to bring the interview to a close.

Sondaz was smoking and looking at her curiously.

"I vill tell you. I vonder vat ees zat clecking. I not heard it before. Ah, it ees zat music-box zere. It must be broken. It make no music—only a cleck."

"But about the divorce?" interrupted Mlle. Rosa impatiently.

"Ah! ze divorce? So! I haf ze paper now, so I vill tell you zat—"

He stopped and puffed at his cigarette with an air of extreme enjoyment.

"Go on."

"I go on!" he said coolly. "Vell, ve vas married in Vera Cruz, eh? You know zat?"

"I only know that you say so."

"Yes, I say so, and ycu haf signed zis paper zat ees in my pocket. So!"

"To make you cease torturing me."

"Ah, zat is funny. Curse zat clecking! Vell, now, Mademoiselle Rosa, you try to git away from me, but I want ze property that you haf in Detroit, and it not suit me for you to go away from your lofing husband, eh?"

"You wretch!" muttered Rosa.

He did not hear the words, but went on:

"Vell, now, you see, I tell you," puffing at the cigarette a little harder than before, "ze marriage vas a mock marriage, and you not ma wife at all."

"You villain! You wretched creature!" cried Mlle. Rosa, as she ran toward the door.

Sondaz's iron grasp was on her wrist before she could get across the room.

"Vat would you do?" he hissed.

"Do? I would alarm the house and have you turned over to the police. That's what I would do. I would teach you that the man who outrages the law in North America is speedily punished. We have jails, into which such contemptible scoundrels are put to answer for their crimes. Do? That's what I would do!"

She tried to drag her hand away from him, but he held her as in a vise.

"Caramba! You leetle fool! Curse zat clecking! You come back. Vhat good would it do to tell ze police? Vhat haf I done? You ma wife. Ze paper say so—ze paper vhat you haf signed."

"You know the paper lies!"

"Yees, ze paper lies. Zat is so. But eef you not ma wife—and of course I know you not, vhy, vhat avails zat to say, vhen ze paper say you are, eh? Curse zat clecking. I smash zat music-box in a minute!"

"You villain!"

"You say zat before," he said, with a careless laugh, and he rolled another cigarette, and lighted it at the ashes of the old one. "Now, listen to me. You not ma wife. I know zat. But everybody vill think you are vhen zey see zis paper. Vell, you gif me ze money—\$200,000—and I destroy zis paper, and gif you anotha one, confessing zat ze marriage vas a mockery, and zat you not ma wife."

For a moment Rosa reflected. Then she exclaimed quickly:

"I will do it."

CHAPTER XIX.

A FIGHT AND A DISAPPEARANCE.

FERNANDO SONDAZ was so surprised at the acquiescence of Rosa, that at first he could not do anything but look at her stupidly and smoke. Then he recovered himself, and turned his head to hide the gratified smile that would rise to his lips.

"Shall I write ze paper now?" he asked, mockingly. "Eef you haf ze money, I vill do it."

"I have not the money with me; you know that."

"But you can write me ze check on ze First National Bank of Detroit. Zen I geet ze money and gif you ze paper."

"I have not one-twentieth of that sum in a Detroit Bank. It will take me several days to get \$200,000. My lawyer has charge of my affairs, and I must get the money through him."

"But you not tell him—"

"What?"

"About ze paper—ze mock marriage! Caramba! I am ze fool! Of course you vill not. You dare not!"

He went on smoking with his usual air of calmness, and for a minute nothing disturbed the stillness of the room but the clicking of the box on the table at the back of them.

"Vell, Mademoiselle Rosa," he said at last, "vhen am I to haf ze money?"

"A month?"

"Too long! Caramba! I not trust my business for a month."

"Three weeks?"

"No. Not so long as zat! It will not do. In one week from zis day I must haf ze money, and zen I gif you ze paper."

"Containing a confession that you deceived me by a mock marriage in Vera Cruz, and that I was never your wife even for an instant?"

"Yes. You never vas ma wife, efen for an eenstant. So!"

"Where do you want the money paid?"

"Here in zis parlor—ze parlor of ze India-rubber house, on Randolph street, Detroit. So!"

"I will do it. But—I shall bring a witness."

The Mexican blanched slightly.

"Witness? Who vill you bring? I moost know. I vill not troost you, unless you tell me. Zen I vill take your vord. I know you vill tell ze truth."

Rosa tossed her head contemptuously.

"I cannot say that for you," she retorted.

"No. Zat ees not my beesness. I haf to tell ze—ze—big lie sometimes. Zat ees my beesness. Caramba! Zat clecking drive me mad!"

He looked savagely in the direction of the box on the other table, as if he would like to carry out his threat and smash it to pieces.

"Well, senor, is there anything else for me to wait for? I should like to take the next train to Monroe. The circus will play within a small radius of Detroit for a month to come, so I shall be able to keep my appointment with you, never fear!"

"I do not fear. I not fear anything!"

He had reached the door and opened it carelessly, as he uttered the last sentence.

"You lie!" cried a woman's voice, as Alice Trevilany stood in the doorway, with her usual soft gray eye flashing defiance and anger.

"Pooh! Alice! Vhat you do here? Zis is very wrong," he sneered.

"Keep away from me! I will speak!" she answered. "I heard all you said in this room."

"Leestening, eh?" he interrupted, sardonically.

"Only since Hank Blower came in here to see if his machine over there was safe. He didn't know you. But I did, and I knew that you couldn't be here for any good, after what you had been doing on Belle Isle. So I listened, and I tell you Fernando Sondaz, that if you ever try to do vhat you say my father's will commands I will turn you over to the police."

"Ze poleece, eh? Vhat for?"

"For stealing Mademoiselle Rosa's jewels among other things," was Alice's quick reply.

"Stealing jewels? You must zink I common thief. I not steal Mademoiselle Rosa's jewels."

"I tell you again you lie!"

"You so complimentary," he snarled. "Eef I steal ze jewels, where are they?"

"Here!" suddenly interposed Mlle. Rosa as she held up the bag that was still fastened around her waist under her shawl.

"Caramba!" hissed Sondaz.

"He stole them and hid them in the cellar of the house on the island, where I found them—all but one valuable brooch, a turquoise set with diamonds. That is missing."

"Oh, zat ees missing, eh? Vell, I haf no further beezness here. I go. Mademoiselle Rosa, you will be here in von week, and bring your vitness. I haf your promise zat he vill not do anything but vitness ze beezness, and zen go away without doing me harm?"

"I did not agree to all that, but I will now," answered Rosa, scornfully. "Yes, I promise!"

"Zanks! Zen I go!"

"Stop right here!" commanded the short, puffy man who had come into the parlor to look after the mysterious machine on the table, and who was no other than the lecturer in the museum tent where we first met Alice Trevilyan.

He placed himself in the pathway of the Mexican and held up his hand threateningly as he spoke.

"What does zis fool want?" demanded Sondaz angrily, as he attempted to push past the puffy man.

The latter, who was a great deal stronger than his size would indicate, seized the Mexican's arm, and with one twist, threw him upon a sofa behind the door.

"Don't try no monkey shines with Hank Blower, young man," puffed the little man.

Sondaz sprung to his feet, with that dangerous dirk of his in his hand. Before he could use it, it was snatched from him and hurled through a side window into a vacant lot at the side of the house.

"You shall not do murder while I can prevent it," said Rosa, sternly, for it was she who had seized the knife.

"Caramba!" hissed the Mexican, as he looked from one to the other, showing his white teeth, like a hyena at bay.

"I don't care for yer outlandish swearing," declared Hank Blower, in his deep base voices, which we have already remarked was very powerful in proportion to his size. "You took away this young lady, Miss Alice Trevilyan, who is in my care, and who is under contract to me for the season."

"I am her guardian," muttered Sondaz.

"I don't care what you are. I know you're a scoundrel, and these young ladies know it too. I'm going to have some satisfaction for your taking Alice away in the middle of a performance, or I'll give you up to the police. That's the kind of whale Hank Blower is, and don't you forget it."

"Pooh! Ze man ees a fool!" said Sondaz, as he arose from the sofa, and again tried to walk out of the parlor.

Hank Blower was naturally quick-tempered, and this reference to him as a fool made him fairly foam with rage.

"Durn your black heart! I'll show you whether I am a fool!" he yelled.

He flew at the Mexican, and with a well-directed blow, hit him full in the mouth, knocking him down, with his lips bleeding.

As Sondaz fell, something dropped out of his bosom from behind the lapels of his closely-buttoned coat.

"My brooch!" cried Rosa, as she picked up the object and showed it to Alice.

"Gentlemen, what is this?" interposed the mild voice of Miss Jane Priest, the landlady, as she stepped up to the parlor door from the domestic regions in the rear. "This is not very gentlemanly, and, besides, I am afraid that you may hurt the furniture."

"Oh, no, this is gentlemanly, Miss Priest," answered Hank Blower, breathlessly. "We are having a little controversy, this gentleman and I; but I think from the look of him, the argument is about settled."

Miss Priest might have been excused for coming forward to remonstrate, for certainly the proceedings in her parlor were not of a very soothing or gentlemanly character.

Sondaz, who had been partly stunned by the blow from Blower's fist, was sitting in the middle of the carpet, holding his handkerchief to his wounded mouth, and glancing from one to the other with his evil eyes half closed.

"Caramba!" he muttered, and got up.

"Are you hurt, Mr. Samson?" asked Miss Priest, feelingly.

"Not at all. It ees ze fun of zis gentleman, zat is all."

Miss Priest retired. She had too much to attend to in the kitchen to bother herself about boarders' quarrels, as long as they did not kill each other.

Hank Blower stood in the doorway, still with his fists clinched, ready to stop any hostile demonstrations on the part of the Mexican.

Mlle. Rosa was showing the turquoise ring to Alice Trevilyan.

"Now, Mr. What's-your-name, what are you going to do about this thing? I want some money satisfaction for the loss of Miss Trevilyan's services, which happened by your enticing her out of the tent. As for your being her guardian, I don't believe it, and even if you were the law would not allow you to injure my business by taking her away in the middle of her work."

"Caramba! Why vill you bother me. I don't know you, man," answered the Mexican pettishly, as he still held his handkerchief to his mouth. "Zhink yourself so loocky I not sue you for—vat you call?—ze 'sault and batterie!"

"Yes, I'd like to see you!" retorted Hank. "I'd like—Why, darn me if you ain't Senor—"

"Hush!" cried the Mexican, in agony, holding up his hands.

"Hush—nothing!" replied the puffy man. "I knew you down in Mexico! Why, you're Fernando Sondaz, or—the devil!"

The Mexican again sprung at the puffy man—this time without a weapon. The two were in a close embrace, struggling hither and thither, (for the Mexican, not being taken by surprise this time, was able to use all his strength with his adversary), when strong hands were laid upon the shoulders of each combatant, and they were pulled forcibly apart.

"What's all this?" demanded a stern voice.

The Mexican and Hank, at the same instant, saw that two stalwart police officers were holding them, and evidently considering whether they ought to arrest the whole party.

"What's all zis? I'll tell you what it is. Zis woman is a thief, and zis man is her accomplice. I call on you to arrest them both."

The audacity of this assertion, which, it is needless to say, was made to divert attention from himself, made Rosa start indignantly, and served to arouse the suspicions of the policemen.

The man whose hand had been on Fernando Sondaz's shoulder, removed it and moved toward Rosa.

Quick as lightning, Sondaz took advantage of the temporary diversion, and dashing out of the doorway, and across the veranda, was half a block away before the police realized that he had gone.

"After him! That is Fernando Sondaz, the man who is wanted in a dozen places in the country. After him, boys; there's a reward for his arrest," yelled Hank Blower excitedly.

"Yes, don't let him escape! Don't let him escape! He's a dangerous man!" cried Alice Trevilyan, as she ran to the front door and tried to follow the fugitive with her eyes.

"Well, ladies and gentlemen, I don't know about this," said one of the policemen, deliberately. "Who will make a charge against him?"

"I will!" declared Hank, bringing his fist with a tremendous thump, down upon the table.

"And so will I!" added Alice.

This seemed to satisfy the policemen, and they were about to rush out of the house in pursuit when Mlle. Rosa placed herself in their path.

"No! It is no use! He is safe now. Don't go after him."

"What, Mlle. Rosa, do you defend him?" gasped the puffy Hank, in astonishment.

"Yes, for the present!" was Mlle. Rosa's significant response.

CHAPTER XX.

THE MEXICAN'S UNWELCOME TRAVELING COMPANION.

It was nearly twelve o'clock in the day when Mlle. Rosa, Alice Trevilyan and Hank Blower alighted from a train in Monroe and made their way to the circus ground.

Hank Blower carried under his arm a box that Mlle. Rosa remembered as having been in the parlor at the India-rubber house, during her interview with Sondaz.

"Ain't this a beauty, Mlle. Rosa?" asked Hank, as he nursed the box carefully in his arms, preparatory to going into the tent that was already decorated with huge paintings of curiosities and freaks, like that in Detroit already described.

"What is it?" asked Rosa.

"What is it? Why it's my new talking machine, or phonograph. It's a new invention; it work's by electricity and it is the greatest curiosity that I shall have in the tent. Listen to this!"

He touched a spring as he spoke, and Rosa heard the clicking that had so annoyed Sondaz in the India-rubber house parlor.

"What does it do?"

"Well, I'll tell you," answered Hank, complacently. "Put it in a room where there is anybody talking, and it will repeat every word of the conversation afterward, by just turning a little handle that fits into the inside of it, I have the handle in my pocket. Come in after the afternoon performance, and I will show you how it operates."

The puffy Hank, with his precious box hugged close to his bosom, went into the small tent, and Alice and Rosa walked on and entered the dressing-room of the large main circus-tent.

The phonograph, that Hank guarded so care-

fully, was a comparatively new invention at that time, but already it had been brought so near to perfection that it would, as Hank said, repeat any remarks made in its presence, word for word.

Sol Fixer was naturally a cool fellow, but he could not repress some signs of astonishment when Mlle. Rosa, accompanied by Alice, entered the tent with which the dressing-rooms connected.

The girls both bent their heads in sarcastic greeting, and passed on.

"Where can Rube be, I wonder?" said Rosa. "I have not seen him since we were on the river."

"I missed him at the door of the India-rubber house," answered Alice. "We were going there when we met Hank Blower outside. Hank always beards there when he is in Detroit. He had his phonograph in the parlor. It had just come from New York. He was so interested in it that he could not talk about anything else. He even forgot to scold me for leaving the tent yesterday. He was very busy explaining it to Hey Rube, and wanted to show it to him, but Rube said he had certain matters to attend to and told me to wait at the house with Hank for an hour or two, or to try and get a little sleep, and then he would come back in time for the train, so that we could come to Monroe."

"He hasn't come, has he?"

"No. I didn't wait as long as he told me, and I dare say he is looking for me in Detroit. It is a shame," said Alice, remorsefully.

"Here, Alice, der boss wants yer!" interrupted a well-known voice as Munch Jones, with his hat tilted over his eyes and his chin protruding as much as ever, put his head into the tent.

"The boss?" repeated Alice.

"Dat's what. Der feller as runs der freak show—Hank Blower."

"I'm coming."

"Well, now, yer'd better come, if yer wants ter save yer life. Der old man's up on his ear, and don't you forget it."

Having made this observation with the embellishments of nods and winks that generally accompanied his speeches, Munch swaggered away, to tell himself confidentially that he had "mashed both dem gals stone-dead."

Alice, with a kiss of sympathy for Rosa, tripped away to the side-show tent, where she had soon made herself up as a Circassian beauty, and taken her place on the little platform to give Hank Blower an opportunity to expatiate upon her loveliness and the sensation she had created in Stamboul, before his agents had purchased her in the slave-market there, at such a tremendous expenditure, so that the great American public should have an opportunity of seeing her.

Hank felt in such good spirits that he lied rather more freely than usual in the course of his lecture, telling that an Italian count, with a castle on the Adriatic, a mansion in Paris, an opera-house in Berlin, a diamond mine in Africa, and a private volcano of his own on the Bay of Naples, was following the famous Circassian beauty all over the country, and had declared his intention of carrying her off by force in a jeweled carriage and eight white horses if he (Hank Blower) did not give his consent to their marriage.

Here a fresh-colored young man, with a still fresher-colored young girl on his arm, guffawed loudly, in derision.

The lecturer transfixed the young man with a glance, causing him to blush uncomfortably, and went on, sternly:

"Perhaps some of you do not believe what I say. It is the gospel truth, nevertheless. Th's young lady can be the Countess di Montgomerici at any time that I choose to say the word. The count, by his influence with all the crowned heads of Europe, can make them do anything he pleases. He has offered to have me made the Prince of Sans Souci, one of the largest principalities on the borders of the Mediterranean Sea, if I will only consent to his speedy marriage with this incomparably lovely young lady."

"Why don't you do it?" yelled a gentleman from the back of the audience, with a boldness begotten of his obscure position.

Hank saw him, however, and took malicious pleasure in bringing him into prominence.

The gentleman with the red hair, and blue necktie, standing near the door, and who, I am sorry to see, does not respect the ladies present sufficiently to take his hat off, [Here the offender snatched off his hat with a shame-faced look] has asked me why I do not allow myself to be made a prince."

Everybody was looking at the man with the red hair now, and he would have liked to sneak out of the tent if he had dared.

"Well, I'll tell the gentleman with the red hair and blue necktie—who, I am glad to say, has now taken off his hat—why I did not accept the offer of the count to make me a prince. I am a true-born American, decorated with the insignia of freedom and independence. I am a prince of nature, and I spurn the empty titles that are bestowed by luxurious monarchs upon groveling time-servers."

This speech (which Hank had borrowed from a Fourth of July oration), brought thunders of

applause, utterly crushing the fresh-colored youth and the red-headed man.

"The Circassian beauty will now pass among you with her photographs, which are for sale at ten cents each. I call upon you all to guard her in case the Italian count should break into the tent and try to carry her off to his castle on the Adriatic."

Hank Blower grinned to himself as he discharged this parting shot at the audience and noted that the photographs were selling with profitable rapidity.

He did not introduce his fat lady and other curiosities just now, because he did not wish to interfere with the trade in photographs. Instead he retired behind the screen and busied himself with his new acquisition, the talking-machine, or phonograph.

Suddenly there was great shouting in the tent, with general confusion.

Hank ran out from behind the screen and saw Alice in the hands of a man wearing a tall silk hat and expensive clothing, who was trying to drag her to the tent opening which served as a doorway.

The stranger's back was toward Hank, but shouts of "The count! Stop him!" from dozens of male and female throats told him that his Circassian beauty was in peril.

Blower threw himself into the crowd like a big ball, and fought his way in the direction of the intruder.

"Don't let him get out," he bawled.

The fresh-colored youth, still with the fresh-colored girl on his arm, who clung to him convulsively, put himself in the way of the stranger and tried to bar his progress.

With a vicious "Caramba!" the latter swung a powerful right arm and sent the fresh-colored youth sprawling, taking with him in his fall the fresh-colored maiden, the red-haired man and a dozen others.

"Sondaz!" yelled Hank.

"The count!" exclaimed an excitable young woman, with a baby in her arms, who was enjoying the performance to the fullest extent.

"Count be hanged! He's nothing but a measly Greaser! Let me get at him!" gasped Hank, nearly beside himself with rage.

With a mighty struggle he managed to reach the Mexican's side just as he got through the doorway. Sondaz threw out his foot, and dexterously tripped the showman, so that he fell headlong upon the boy who was turning at the hand-organ, and who had never stopped his music for an instant all through the turmoil.

In another minute Sondaz had pushed Alice into a carriage that stood at the entrance to the circus grounds, and was driving away as fast as the two horses could take him.

The circus grounds were some distance from the railroad station, and Sondaz called to the driver who seemed to be quite at the Mexican's disposal, to hurry and make the one o'clock train for Detroit.

"Where are you taking me?" asked Alice, as soon as she recovered her breath. "What right have you to hustle me about in this manner?"

"I am your guardian, eh, and I not let you stay in ze circus any longer. I leave zis part of ze country next week, and I want you to go too as ma wife."

"Your wife?"

"Yees, ma wife. You know what ze vill of ze old man say—zat you marry me. Vell, I want you to marry me. I love you."

"Love!" exclaimed Alice, scornfully. "What do you know about such a holy feeling? You have no right to trouble me about this matter for another year anyhow. You know that I loathe the very sight of you."

"So? Vell, then, I keep you away from ze circus, anyhow. I take you down to Vera Cruz. You moost sign some papers down zere. I cannot wait for a year. Eef you not love me, you not marry me zen, and I geet ze property. You know zat ze will say so, eh?"

"I cannot understand why my father made such a will. It is not like him to do such a thing, to make his son and daughter beggars."

"Unless you marry me," put in the Mexican, with a furtive smile.

"That is impossible!" said the girl, decidedly.

"Caramba! Vell, ve vill see!"

He put his head out of the carriage and urged on the driver.

The train was coming along the railroad in the distance as they neared the station.

"Hurry up. Ve shall mees it," cried Sondaz. "Caramba! Alice, that hair steecking up looks funny, but ve vill feex it on ze train."

And the train coming from the direction of Detroit was nearing the station, and the two trains both drew up together.

"Now, Alice, come on."

"I will not go. I will scream," declared the girl, who now began to realize that she was indeed in the power of the Mexican.

"You scream and I vill keell you," he hissed in her ear, as he drew his dirk-knife partly out of his sleeve.

The girl shuddered. She had been up all night and was nervous from loss of sleep. Besides, the hold that Sondaz had so long exer-

cised upon her was not to be shaken off in an instant. Hardly knowing what she did she allowed herself to be led into a parlor-car, which, as it happened, was empty, save for an old gentleman asleep in a corner, and a mother with two little children, who was too much occupied by her maternal cares to notice anything else.

Alice dropped into one of the luxuriously-cushioned chairs with a feeling of rest that even her terrible situation, in the power of Sondaz, could not entirely dispel. Her fatigue and the excitement she had suffered for the last twelve hours had almost overcome her.

"Caramba! Zat was a close call," muttered the Mexican, as the train began to slowly move out of the station. "Alice, you go to ze toilet-room and fix your hair, and here is a big cloak wiz ze hood that you can put over ze spangly dress. I brought it for ze purpose."

He handed the cloak to the girl, and at the same time his evil eyes became fixed on a face that was within a few inches of his outside the window, the owner of it standing on a platform of the other train.

Only for a second or two was the face there, as the train moved away from it.

"Caramba!" panted Sondaz, under his breath. He could not utter another word.

"So, Fernando, at last!" exclaimed a cheery voice, as Hey Rube stepped into the car, and stood with his hands thrust carelessly into his pockets, looking into the face of the discomfited Mexican.

"Caramba!"

CHAPTER XXI.

TIM ON THE AGGRESSIVE.

BUDWORTH BUDDICOMBE, by the time the morning parade was over, had played himself into a good humor.

He had found that his beloved base-drum had not suffered by the unwonted experience on land and water, but responded to the touch of its owner with all its old-time sonorousness and effectiveness. Hence he was disposed to take a more lenient view of Sol Fixer's vagaries than when he was rowing laboriously on the Detroit River in pursuit of the Petrel.

Just as Alice left the big tent in response to Munch's message from Hank Blower, Bud stepped in and saw Mlle. Rosa. His eyes flashed with pleasure.

"Well, blow me tight if this ain't the funniest go as I ever see'd," he exclaimed, as, with his big drum in his left hand, he shook hands heartily with the girl. "Why, where did you come from? The last time I see'd yer you was on the dock in Detroit with Sol. Then afterward I see'd Sol without you, and now here you are yourself. It's too much for my blooming brain, that's what it is."

Bud shook his head solemnly. He really was so confused over the unusual events that had followed each other so closely since the previous evening that he began to have doubts of his own sanity.

Mlle. Rosa went to her dressing-room to get ready for the performance. She had determined to go through her duties as if nothing had happened out of the usual way.

The public had already been admitted to the tent, and the many rows of seats rising tier above tier around the ring, were rapidly filling with pleasure-seekers.

Sol Fixer, who had been superintending the seating of the vast audience, came into the performers' tent, where Bud sat examining his drum, and fencing the questions that were being put to him in a continuous stream by the curious riders, acrobats and others who had noticed his absence in the morning.

"Bud," said Fixer.

"Well?"

"I want to speak to you."

Bud reluctantly left his drum in a corner and stepped forward.

"See hyar, Bud. Thar wuz er good deal uv fun last night."

"Sure," acquiesced Buddicombe.

"Yes, but it was only fun."

"So?"

"Yes, and I want you to say nothing about it. You understand?"

"But—" stammered Bud.

"What I say, goes. It will be best for you not ter say anything," concluded Sol, as he walked away.

"He means he'll discharge me if I open my blooming fly-trap, I s'pose," muttered Bud, indignantly. "Well, all right, my covey! Just you wait awhile."

Meanwhile Sol Fixer was worried about Tim and Jim Swan. He had not seen either of them since the boy attacked him in the procession. The boy he could easily subdue, but Jim Swan he knew to be a determined man, who cared for nobody when his blood was up.

"If thet thar darned fool has got on ter the beezness uv me an' ther Greaser, he's likely ter put me through, in spite uv my teeth," he reflected. "It wuz kind uv shady, all thet thar monkey work on Belle Isle, but ther darned Mexican offered me good terms and what wuz I ter do? I must make an honest dollar when

I kin. Curse him! I'd like ter know whar all thet jewelry is—especially thet thar turquoise pin."

"Say, Sol, hadn't we better commence ther overture?" asked Bud, who was too much of an enthusiast in his profession to think of anything but the circus during a performance.

"Yes; git in thar, you fellers! What are yer all doing hyar?" he yelled, in his usual harsh tones.

The musicians all scuttled into the box that had been set up for them near the ring just by the side of the performers' tent, so that they could reach their seats without going into the ring at all.

A crash of brass music, with Bud's drum and cymbals doing tremendous execution, enlivened everything and provoked a buzz of satisfaction from the vast audience that by this time filled every seat and nearly all the standing room.

"Git on yer horses, thar!" commanded Sol, and there was a great bustle as everybody mounted his or her steed for the "grand triumphal entry," as it was called in the show-bills.

Mlle. Rosa came out of her dressing-tent in her long riding-habit, and taking her horse from the groom who was holding the bridle, looked the animal carefully over, and then, unassisted, sprung into the saddle, giving Sol Fixer a sidelong glance as she did so that he did not quite understand.

He mounted his own horse, to lead the procession, and was about to give the signal, when Hank Blower came running in, out of breath and more puffy than ever.

"Sol!"

"Well?"

"She's gone!"

"Who?"

"Why—that Mexican fellow, Sondaz!"

Sol changed color slightly at this name.

"I thought you said she," he growled.

"Yes, I mean she—he—both of 'em."

"Git out uv this hyar. We hev to go into ther ring. Tell me when we come out. They are waiting for ther cue for ther entrance music."

"But, Sol—"

"Git away, I tell yer."

"But I can't git away. Sondaz has stolen Alice right out o' the tent, an' they've gone off to Detroit."

"Detroit?" echoed Sol, muttering: "What in thunder is ther feller after? He's going to make himself solid, and then give me away. That's it! I know him. He'd sell his own brother."

He sat on his horse communing with himself, with all the riders in their gay costumes around him, and with Hank Blower watching his face anxiously, as if he would find out by its expression what he intended to do.

The people in the great tent were getting impatient, and ominous yells and groans began to rise from all quarters of the auditorium.

The overture was concluded, and there was nothing to entertain the thousands who had paid to go into the circus, and were demanding the equivalent of their money.

Rosa here rode up to Fixer and asked the reason of the delay. She spoke in a quiet, business-like tone, such as she had always been accustomed to use in addressing the ringmaster, and nothing in her manner betrayed that she remembered anything about the events of the night before, or Sol Fixer's connection with them. At present she was only concerned with the business of the circus; at another time her private affairs might come up for consideration.

"Why do we not go in, Mr. Fixer?" she asked.

"We shall in a second or two," was his quiet response; adding loudly: "Fall in, thar!"

His glance fell upon a corner of the tent, and leaping from his horse, he ran over and seized Tim Trevilyan by the shoulder.

"Yer young varmint! Whar hev you been?" he hissed. "I'm going ter horsewhip you after ther show. Mark that."

"You may as well do it now," replied the boy, defiantly, "for I don't know where I shall be after the show."

"Yer don't? Wal, I'll tell you whar you'll be! You'll be right hyar. Hank!"

"What d'ye want?" responded Hank!

"Here's this hyar varmint uv er boy. He put ther Mexican up ter taking Alice away. He an' Sondaz want ter beat his sister out uv ther property she'll git in another twelve months—"

Tim, with his handsome young face aflame with indignation, could not stand this outrageous assertion.

"Liar!"

As he uttered this word at the top of his voice, he raised a small riding-whip that he had held carelessly in his hand, and struck with all his force at Sol Fixer's face.

Another whip was interposed just in time to save the ringmaster from a cut that would have left a mark on his features for months. At the same time a sweet voice that the boy loved dearly uttered his name:

"Tim!"

Mlle. Rosa was standing between him and Sol Fixer.

Though she had spoken as gently as possible, her utterance of the one simple word had been sufficient to recall him to his senses with a feeling of shame.

"I beg your pardon, Sol," he said, humbly, for Rosa's glance had demanded that he should apologize for his ebullition of temper, and he never disobeyed even a mute appeal from her.

"Mr. Fixer," she said, coldly. "I think that an apology on your part is Tim's due."

"Oh, wal, I didn't mean no harm ter ther kid, uv course. I was a little mad, but I'm all over it now. Tim, you'll be ready for yer act, won't yer? It comes right after Mlle. Rosa's manege turn."

Tim looked inquiringly at Rosa, who gave him a barely perceptible nod.

"All right, Sol, I'll be ready," he said.

"Touch that bell for ther music," cried Sol, to one of the grooms.

The band struck up "See the Conquering Hero Comes," and the gay cavalcade, with Sol Fixer and Mlle. Rosa at his head, filed into the arena, amid thundering cheers from the good-natured audience, whose impatience was forgotten at once when the cause for it disappeared.

But, as Sol threw himself into the saddle, he hurriedly whispered to Hank Blower:

"Keep your eye on that boy. I'll talk to you after the show."

"But—Alice? What about her?"

"Can't do anything now. Wait."

And with this cold comfort, Hank Blower—who was really very much worried about the girl more for her own sake than his own—had to be content.

"Hank," said Tim, as soon as the procession had disappeared, and the performers' tent was comparatively empty; "where is Alice?"

"Darned if I know, Tim. She's gone away with that guardian of yours—against her will I am sure, and I expect they are pretty near Detroit by this time. I don't trust that Sondaz, and I s'pose he thinks he can get a hold on her property in some way if he has her by herself, with no one to advise her. The yellow rascal may make her marry him, for all I can tell."

"The wretch!" muttered the boy, through his set teeth.

"He says he loves her, and I shouldn't wonder if he persuaded her into marriage. Then he can get his hooks on her money now, instead of waiting a year for it."

"She hates the sight of him," declared the boy, hotly.

"Does she? Well, I'm glad to hear it, for, do you know, I never was quite sure about that. He's such a cunning cuss, that you can't tell how he might get over a girl. He might fascinate her, you know."

The boy turned up his nose at such an absurd notion.

"Such a splendid Circassian she makes, too! Why, there's a fortune in her pictures alone!" exclaimed Hank, regretfully.

Tim strolled into the dressing-room, followed by Hank, who had left an assistant in charge of his exhibition, and began to get ready for his performance.

He had just finished his toilet, and was standing before the admiring Hank like a minute, but perfectly-proportioned young Hercules, when a rustling in the performers' tent, and the particularly loud playing of the band, as it threw all its force into the last few measures, told him that the triumphal entry had reached its conclusion.

CHAPTER XXII.

A CLOSE CALL FOR THE CLOWN.

"MADEMOISELLE ROSA will now appear in her great manege act on her beautiful trained mare, Daisy."

Sol Fixer, in boots reaching above his knee, with a military coat buttoned tightly across his massive chest, and with an officer's undress cap stuck rakishly on one side of his head, looked, as he made this announcement in stentorian tones, anything but the rough bully we have seen him to be in private. His professional manner, and even speech, were entirely different from that he ordinarily assumed when not before an audience.

"Ready, Mademoiselle Rosa!" he called out from the ring, as he looked toward the opening from which she was to emerge.

He knew that she was ready before he made the announcement, but it is a professional trick to try and make the audience think that everything is done in a casual, unpremeditated way. It has a better effect than to let the public know how carefully every movement and word is rehearsed beforehand.

"The lady is quite ready," he observed, in courteous accents, to the leader of the band, who bowed and smiled in return with the elegance of a Beau Brummel.

Bud bestowed a preliminary thump upon his base-drum, and "The Carnival of Venice," burst upon the ear, just as Mademoiselle Rosa, in a different costume from that which she had worn in the triumphal entry, caracolled into the arena on a white horse that fully deserved the epithet

"beautiful," that Sol had bestowed upon it in his speech.

The riding-habit worn by Mlle. Rosa now was of dark-blue velvet, with gold trimmings down the front, and gold buttons. On her head was a blue velvet cap, from beneath which her long curls escaped, and flowed over her shoulders in a wealth of sunlight.

"Mademoiselle Rosa, ladies and gentlemen," announced Sol, as he stood in the center of the ring, with his long whip in his hand, and watched the effect of the performance upon the spectators.

"Hallo, you sir, you've come, have you?" he continued, as he slashed his whip around the legs of the clown, who at this moment strolled into the ring with a tired limp that the audience found very funny.

At the cut of the whip the clown jumped up in the air and yelled violently.

"Mind what you are doing, sir. You will frighten the lady's horse," admonished Sol, as he raised his whip as if about to repeat the blow.

"Say, Fixer, don't yer be so durned smart," replied the clown, in an undertone. "I don't want yer ter cut my legs off. See?"

Mlle. Rosa's horse had swerved slightly when the clown jumped and screamed, but it is only reasonable to suppose that such a well-trained animal moved in response to a hint from his rider.

"What's ther matter with yer?" responded the ringmaster, in the same undertone. "Can't yer move er little livelier?"

"No, I can't. I had a good notion not to come into der ring at all. I ain't no clown. I'm engaged by this here circus ter drive der wagons and feed der animals; not ter make a monkey of myself in a clown's dress."

As the discontented clown gave utterance to these sentiments, he tilted his high, sugar-loaf soft felt hat over his eyes, stuck out his chin, and with fists clinched and arms bowed, walked across the ring with so much "toughness" that he provoked screams of laughter from the audience.

Strangely enough, the clown did not take this tribute to his talents at all in good part.

"Say, Sol, I'm goin' out of this ring right now. I ain't going to stay here to be guyed. Now, you hear me. You jist git another clown right now. I'm through, and I want yer ter understand it. See?"

Again he strolled about the ring with his "toughness" portrayed in every movement, and again he got such a laugh from the audience as proved how much they enjoyed him.

This last insult, as he considered it, settled the matter.

He marched out of the ring with so much stateliness that even the saturnine Sol was obliged to join in the mirth, as he laid his hand on the clown's collar, and with one tremendous pull sent him spinning across the ring until he brought up against the center-pole and measured his length on the sawdust.

Mlle. Rosa on her white horse, was showing a number of fancy tricks, such as making the animal walk on three feet, pick up a handkerchief from the ground, stop and go on at the word of command, and so on, after the usual manner of trained circus-horses.

While a fair amount of attention was vouchsafed to this pleasing performance, most of the audience were watching with more interest the boisterous fun that the clown was unwittingly making for them.

The clown went down with such a heavy thump as he rebounded from the center-pole that Sol was not sure at first that he was not seriously injured. The wrathful exclamations of the fallen clown as he clawed around in the sawdust, almost too dazed to arise, at once undeceived him.

"Very well, Sol Fixer, I want yer ter understand dat I leaves dis circus to-night," growled the clown, as he spit some sawdust from his mouth.

"Don't be er fool, Munch," whispered Sol, trying to hide a grin. "You'll make a splendid clown. I never saw anything better."

"Didn't yer? Oh, you're funny, ain't yer?"

"Come, sir; get up!" cried Sol, in his exhibition voice, as he wound the long lash of his whip around Munch Jones, taking care not to hurt him this time, however.

Jones, who had weakly consented to play clown for the afternoon performance because the regular man was indisposed, got up, and, though still indignant, condescended to exchange some of the witticisms that he had carefully rehearsed beforehand, with the ringmaster.

Then, after the manner of clowns in general, he pretended to be very much in love with the lady on horseback, and made elephantine gesticulations of admiration that, in conjunction with his protruding chin and Bowery swagger, were irresistibly comical.

"You cannot have the lady, sir. She is already engaged to a Chinese mandarin, with two pigtailed, and a glass palace on the banks of the Kiang Ytsang," proclaimed Sol, loudly, as with the dignity of a true ringmaster, he marched about the ring, and glanced patronizingly over the audience.

"I don't want her then, cully. You kin bet yer socks on dat," answered Munch Jones, who had the greatest difficulty in making himself believe that remarks addressed to the clown were not insults to him personally.

"Mademoiselle Rosa will now perform her great feat of hurdle-jumping and reining up her beautiful mare, Daisy, in the center of a circle ten feet in diameter," proclaimed Sol.

A signal was given to half a dozen grooms, who ran from the performers' tent, and proceeded to get the appliances ready for the hurdle feat.

A long incline had already been built from high up in the tent to the edge of the ring. This incline, on stout trestles, and solid as the ground itself, was covered with tan bark. At the top was a platform wide enough for a horse to turn around on, and guarded by a railing.

The music played vigorously while the preparations were being made, and Munch Jones, as clown, spun his hat upon a stick, and did other Merry-Andrew tricks that he had learned at odd moments while acting as a driver for the Great Astronomic Circus and Menagerie.

Near the bottom of the incline two hurdles were placed across it, some ten feet apart.

The adventurous rider was to gallop down the incline from the high platform, clear the two hurdles at a bound, and pull up her horse in the middle of the circle in the ring.

Mlle. Rosa, who had been resting in her tent while the hurdles were being placed, now came out in response to a call from Sol, and was received with tremendous cheering by the audience.

She bowed, and then busied herself about her mare. Carefully she examined the saddle-girths and bridle, and looked to see that the bit was properly adjusted. A failure to make the leap properly might mean death to herself or horse, or to both.

The band was still playing loudly. Bud especially being so occupied in his share of the noise that he had no eyes for anything but the big black notes on the paper before him that told him where to come in with his drum and cymbals.

Rosa allowed Sol to assist her into the saddle, although she did not need his help, and galloped her mare up the incline, the hurdles being removed to allow her to pass, and at once replaced.

At the top she made Daisy caracole on the platform as easily as if she had been on the ground. Mlle. Rosa was a perfect horsewoman, and her control of the mare never lapsed for an instant.

"Now, look out there," yelled Sol to Munch as he brought his long whip into play around the legs of the clown. "Don't get in the lady's way."

Munch's indignation, which had somewhat cooled down, rose at once at this off-band treatment, and he ran across the ring with a ludicrous haste that drew a storm of laughter from the audience.

Sol chased him around the tent-pole, and Munch, in mortal terror of the whip, moved with more hurry than he generally considered in keeping with his dignity.

"Are you ready, Mademoiselle Rosa?" asked Sol, as the girl, like a beautiful statue on her white horse, sat motionless, but with every nerve strained, on the little platform near the roof of the tent.

"Ready!" she responded.

"Very well, then. Get out of the way there," with another cut at Munch Jones with the long whip.

The music suddenly stopped playing, as Jones, boiling with rage, stumbled over the sawdust of the ring on his way out.

As the music ceased Mlle. Rosa sent her mare galloping once around the platform and then down the incline in a perfect whirlwind of speed.

Just as she reached the hurdle, a gentle lift on the reins caused Daisy to rise like a bird in her leap.

"Look out, Munch," screamed Sol.

The clown was lying on his back in the very spot in the ten-foot circle where the mare's hoofs would drop.

Those who sat close enough to the ring to comprehend his danger held their breath in horror.

Rosa, who had felt the thrill of pleasure that accompanies the successful performance of any difficult undertaking felt her heart turn cold as she found herself, mare and all, actually over the poor wretch squirming and trying to get away.

It was but a second.

Then a small, lithe, active figure jumped into the ring from somewhere, threw itself upon the clown, and, with a swift and powerful movement, rolled him out of the fatal circle.

Then there was a crack from Bud's drum and cymbals, as Daisy alighted on all her four feet at once, in the exact place that Munch had occupied an instant before.

The roar of applause that shook the tent was not altogether for Mademoiselle Rosa, clever as her feat was. It was partly meant for the

slight boy who, at the risk of his life, had saved the clumsy Munch Jones from a terrible disaster.

Mademoiselle Rosa understood this, for, leaping from her mare, she took the boy's hand and led him forward, with the result of more hand-clapping and shouting than had perhaps ever been heard in the great town of Monroe before since it came into existence.

In the midst of the uproar Bud leaned over the front of the box in which the band were seated, and shouted, as he waved the drumsticks wildly:

"Tim, you're a blooming clever cove, and I'd trust you with my drum. Blow me tight ef I wouldn't!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

A DESPERATE LEAP.

FOR a minute after Hey Rube had so unexpectedly appeared in the railroad car before Sondaz and Alice, the Mexican sat back in his chair, with a look of blank astonishment.

Hey Rube was regarding him with an amused smile, while Alice, knowing the determined character of both men, trembled, in the expectation of a deadly outbreak.

The Mexican and detective had not met since the former raised the dirk to kill Rube just as the wall of the house on Belle Isle gave way.

Sondaz was not likely to feel very comfortable now, therefore. It would be only a natural proceeding for the detective to attack him and try to wreak vengeance upon him for his behavior then.

"Well, Fernando Sondaz, you're a nice specimen of a South American gentleman, eh?" was Rube's sarcastic observation, at last.

The old gentleman and the mother with her babies were occupied with their own affairs, and were supremely unconscious that they were very near tragedy on that bright afternoon.

"Vhat you mean?" asked the Mexican, huskily.

He would have given worlds to have that contemptuous face under his foot.

"Well, senor, if you don't think that your proceedings early this morning, when your humble servant was in rather an awkward situation, were rather peculiar, then I am afraid I must give you up for a bad job."

"Caramba!"

"I beg your pardon!"

The mocking smile was almost unbearable, and the Mexican bit his lip till the blood came.

"You vant something of me, eh?" he hissed, as he looked fearfully around the car.

The detective divined his thoughts at once.

"Don't be afraid, senor. There is no one here with me. I must do my business with you without any help."

"Beezness! Vhat beezezness?"

"Well, Sondaz, this is rather an unusual place in which to settle important matters, but since it is your fault that we are on a train, instead of in an ice quiet office somewhere, why you cannot blame me."

"Caramba! I not blame you for nozzing. Only let me meet you in ze fields or on the prairie—anywhere so we not be disturbed."

"Yes?"

"And zen geef me my dirk, and—and—"

"And you would settle me forever, eh?"

Alice involuntarily started forward.

"You seet down," commanded the Mexican, with a growl.

"Hold on, there, senor. That is not a very polite way to speak to a lady," interrupted Hey Rube. Then, turning one of the easy revolving chairs around he added, to Alice: "Allow me to offer you a seat Miss Trevilyan."

"Vhat, you make ze game of me, eh?" yelled the Mexican, so savagely that the old gentleman at the other end of the car half awoke from his nap.

"Sit down, senor. We do not want to attract attention," said Hey Rube calmly.

"Caramba!"

The detective did not heed the oath, but went on:

"Before your little performance of yesterday I was disposed to let bygones be bygones."

"Vhat you mean?"

"I mean the cutting scrape in Deadwood, and the trouble you got into at Vera Cruz."

"Caramba! I answered for what I did in Mexico, didn't I?" asked Sondaz, off his guard for a moment.

"Partly."

"Partly? Caramba! Wholly!"

"No; there's a little matter of forgery and a mock marriage in Vera Cruz—"

"Caramba! You lie!" screamed Sondaz, as he half rose from his seat.

The detective pushed him back and continued coolly:

"As I told you, I might have let bygones be bygones if you had kept away from Detroit, or had behaved yourself when you did get there."

"Caramba! You ze devil!"

"No, only Reuben Rocket, and your very humble servant," was the other's calm response.

"Go on with what you haf to say. But be-

ware of Fernando Sondaz, when hees blood ees up. So!"

Hey Rube smiled carelessly. He had the advantage of the Mexican and both knew it.

Alice had dropped into the chair, turned for her by Reuben. Then, as she put her hand to her head, and felt her hair standing up in that ridiculous fashion of a museum Circassian girl, she went to the ladies' toilet room to use some warm water and make herself presentable.

The Mexican moved slightly, as if he would have detained her. Then remembering that he had directed her to go and take the stiffening out of her hair he knew that she was not trying to escape and settled back in his chair.

Hey Rube saw the movement and guessed its meaning.

"You did not suppose that the young lady was going to jump off a train going thirty miles an hour, eh, Sondaz?" he observed.

"I not suppose nozzing except zat you annoy me. Bef you vant zis end of ze car, say so, and I go to ze other. So!"

"Not so fast, senor!"

Hey Rube dropped his air of careless good-nature, and quickly drawing a pair of handcuffs from his pocket, said:

"Fernando Sondaz, I arrest you for—"

He never finished the sentence.

Like a tiger, the Mexican sprang forward, and dealing the detective a tremendous blow in the chest with his head, darted toward the door.

"Stop him! Stop thief!" cried Hey Rube, as he immediately recovered from the sudden attack.

The colored porter of the car had just come inside.

He put out his hands to stop Sondaz, but before he knew what was the matter, he lay helpless on his back with his head in a brass cuspidor, while the outer door opened and shut with a crash.

Hardly had it done so, when Hey Rube had pulled it open again, and was on the platform outside.

"Hold, Sondaz!" he shouted.

"No! Caramba! Ve vill meet again. *Au revoir!*" came in defiant accents from the now maddened Mexican.

There was a vision of a figure with arms extended, throwing itself in the air, and then, ere the detective could reach it and hold it back, it had disappeared.

The train thundered on, but Fernando Sondaz was rolling and tumbling down a steep embankment, a mass of bruised, cut and scratched humanity.

Hey Rube leaned over from the platform and tried to distinguish the Mexican amid the long grass and bushes that covered the embankment, along the crest of which the train was running at the rate of a mile in every two minutes.

It was a wild spot. At the foot of the embankment, on each side, was a brawling stream—a mere ditch sometimes, but a dangerous torrent when, as was the case now, there had been heavy rains.

Along the ditch was an old-fashioned snake-fence, and beyond that the primeval forest, for miles. Some clearings there were here and there, with the stumps of great trees burned down to the ground, but most of the wood remained as it had been in the days when Indians, bear and wolves had it all to themselves, and when Pontiac was a greater man in Michigan than the governor of the State is now.

"Must have tumbled into the ditch, I guess. Killed, probably," thought Rube. "Well, we can't leave him like that."

He went into the car and sought the conductor.

He found that lordly gentleman comfortably ensconced at the other end of the car in one seat, while he supported his feet in another.

"Fore de Lawd! Whar is dat feller?" asked the colored porter of Hey Rube, as the latter appeared. "He knocked me flat; 'deed he did."

"I don't know where he is. I want the conductor to stop the train, so that we can find out," answered the detective.

"Can't stop the train now," was the short reply of the conductor, as he looked up from his tickets and book that he was trying to make agree with his cash.

Hey Rube had informed him that a man had jumped off the train, and was probably killed.

"Well, if he's dead there is no use in taking him with us, and if he isn't, why, he deserves to be left where he is, for his foolishness."

"And those are your reasons for not stopping the train, eh?" asked Hey Rube, with a ring of something like authority in his voice, which the conductor detected at once.

"Well—" hesitated the conductor.

Hey Rube threw back his coat and allowed the conductor to see a little silver badge on his suspender, that just showed at the arm-hole of his vest.

"Those are the reasons you will not stop the train, eh?" repeated the detective.

"No, sir," announced the conductor, with more respect than he had hitherto shown. "but you see we are a little behind time, and I have orders to make it up between Monroe and Detroit. Besides, there is the No. 3 Express right behind us, and it would be dangerous to run

back, as we should have to do to get to the place where the man jumped. I am sorry, sir, but you see it can't be helped."

The colored porter, who had been listening to the colloquy open-mouthed, here whispered to himself, in an awe-stricken tone:

"If de stranger ain't making de boss take water by de bucketful!"

"Well, if it cannot be done, there is no good in my troubling you any further," said Rube.

"Who was he?" asked the conductor. "I must report the case at headquarters."

"Fernando Sondaz is his name. I do not know his present residence," was Rube's reply.

"Your name, please?"

"Reuben Rocket, Chicago Bureau of Secret Service, at present connected with the Astronomic Circus and Menagerie at Monroe."

"Thanks," said the conductor, as he entered the information in his note-book. "You understand, of course, that I do not desire to throw any obstacles in the way of saving the man who jumped off the train, but am only doing my duty by the company."

"I understand perfectly. Do not let it worry you in the least. We will get off at the next station," answered Rube.

The detective strolled carelessly to the other end of the car, and sat down by Alice Trevilyan's side.

"Oh, Rube, do you think he is killed?" asked Alice, with womanly horror of violent death, even when the victim was the man she most hated and feared in the world.

"He had one or two chances for his life, and he's just the sort of mean cuss that would take them. I'll never believe he is dead till I see his corpse," was Hey Rube's reply.

"I don't see how he could have escaped when he jumped down such a fearful place, with the train going so fast, too."

"No, I guess he won't trouble us any more. Here's our station, Alice. Draw your cloak close around you, so as not to show that spangled Circassian costume of yours."

And with a careless nod of farewell to the conductor, Hey Rube helped the girl down the car steps, and stood with her in the station watching the train speed away on its journey to Detroit.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A RASCALLY COMPACT.

WHEN Fernando Sondaz jumped from the train, his only idea was to get away from the man who seemed to possess supernatural powers that were always ready to be used against him.

What danger there might be in leaping from a train at full speed he did not consider.

Anything to get away from this man, who bore a charmed life and was so relentlessly hunting him down!

There was not the shadow of hesitation when he threw himself from the train to a perhaps horrible fate of wounded loneliness and ultimate death.

He did not even select an eligible place to jump to, and as he left the platform he had hardly noticed whether there were woods, meadows or the river itself by the side of the track.

He struck the side of the bank first, just where a growth of nettles made it anything but pleasant. His face and hands were pricked by the sharp points of the plant and then, before he had time to think, he found himself on his back in the brook at the bottom.

To scramble out of the water, climb over the snake-fence and gain the wood beyond, was the work of an instant. He ran a little way back, where he could not be observed from the railroad, and then for the first time he found time to utter his favorite expletive, "Caramba!"

The train had dashed on, and the engineer evidently had no intention of stopping.

Sondaz satisfied himself of that fact before he ventured from his retirement. Then he came out of the woods and seated himself on the snake fence, in the sun, to think over his situation.

He was truly in a sad plight. He was wet through, his face and hands were scratched, and his clothing torn here and there. The wax had been taken out of his mustache, and his hair hung limp over his forehead.

He was anything but the carefully-dressed, neat gentleman he had been fifteen minutes before.

"Caramba! Vhat a peeckle! Vell. Hey Rube, zis ees one more against you! I vill make eet so hot for you, zat you vill vish you never saw Fernando Sondaz."

As he soliloquized thus, his dark brows a mass of fierce wrinkles and his black eyes, with the white showing more strikingly than ever, he saw his silk hat, which had been knocked off when he jumped from the train, lying partly in the water against a stump, where it had lodged, resisting the efforts of the current to carry it away.

The man probably never lived who could see his silk hat damaged without experiencing emotions of sorrow and anger. Sondaz was no exception to the rule. The sight of his hat, rudely

buffeted by the waters and denuded of its gloss, gave him a shock even worse than that caused by his own fall down the embankment.

"Caramba! Ma hat!" he ejaculated, almost piteously. "I must save ma hat!"

He shook his head over it when he had rescued it from the brook, and then, with a shiver, went back into the woods.

First of all he must dry himself.

In his pocket was a silver water-tight match-box. He collected a lot of brush-wood and dry branches, and, selecting a small clearing a few hundred yards away from the railroad, soon had a bright fire in full operation.

Taking off his clothes separately, he got them all dry in the course of an hour, and then, having done the best he could with his hat, he made himself as presentable as he could under the circumstances, and soon found his spirits rising to their normal condition of self-satisfied equableness.

He was, as near as he could judge, about two miles from Monroe, and he found when he had finished his toilet, that it was about five o'clock in the afternoon.

He had allowed the fire to sink when his clothes were dry, and he stood now looking into the dying embers in deep thought.

"I must see Rosa to-night. Eet not safe to stay here longer. I moost hafe what I can from her, and geet South. Zat detective, Hey Rube, he know all about eet, and I not dare wait for ze veek. No, it not do! Sol!"

He kicked the red coals viciously as he spoke, as an outlet for his feelings.

"Wal, now, what are yer kicking up all thet thar fire and smoke about?" shouted a rough voice.

"Sol!" cried the Mexican.

He had recognized the voice, though no one was in sight but himself.

"Shet yer mouth!" was the ungracious response, as Sol Fixer came into view. "How 'ud yer like me to bawl, out hyar in ther woods, ther name of Fernando Sondaz?"

The Mexican put up his hand to check the other, and Sol laughed.

"Uv course not! You don't like it. And yet you'll let anybody ez may be sneaking around these hyar woods know ez I am away from the circus ter talk to you," added Sol, in a disgusted tone.

"How did you know zat I was here?"

"I didn't know it. D'ye think I kin see a couple of miles inter er wood. I jist walked out this way so ez I could think over things. I see'd ther smoke from this fire when I wuz er mile away, an' I jist walked over ter it in curiosity."

The Mexican nodded.

"And zen you found—"

"One of the greatest villains that ever kept out of jail. Yes, you're quite right, Fernando," added Sol, with a malicious grin.

A scowl clouded the Mexican's brow for a second, but he drove it away. He could not afford to quarrel with Sol Fixer just now.

"Vell, now, what are you going to do, Sol? Mademoiselle Rosa got all zose jewels back, an' zere is nozzing to divide. She is going to pay me—"

"How much?" broke in Sol.

His eagerness put the wily Mexican on his guard.

"Not mooch! She would not listen to ze two hundred thousand dollars, but she will pay me something next veek."

"Without my help, eh?"

"Yes, but see here, Sol. I cannot wait till next veek. I moost haf ze money now. Eef you can make her gif me ze half of vhat ve wanted by to-morrow, vhy, then you can haf your share, and I vill go. If not, I moost leave it all, and you vill get nozzing."

"Why?"

"Because, I cannot stay in Meechigan twenty-four hours longer. Hey Rube has von, two, tree charges he can make against me, and I would go to ze Penitentiary before I could say—vhat ees zat—Jack Robinson, eh?"

"Very likely. But how am I to make Rosa come to terras?"

"Zat is further along?"

"Yes. Wal, now, before we go any further how do you come to be hyar in the woods by yourself? The last I heard uv yer, yer was ske-daddling with Alice Trevilyan. You seem ter hev queer ways of yer own."

"Caramba!" spluttered the Mexican.

"That don't mean nothing. How did yer git hyar? Thet's what I want ter know."

Sondaz here told all that had befallen him since he ran to the railroad station with Alice in the carriage, and wound up by cursing Hey Rube with the greatest heartiness and sincerity.

"He's er dandy, eh, Sondaz?" was Sol's remark, as the Mexican concluded his narration.

"Curse heem!" responded Sondaz.

"Seems ter me that he's more uv a curse ter us, eh? But do yer know whar he is now?"

"How can I know? How can any von know? He move like ze lightning, and nozzing can hurt heem."

"Not even when a house falls on him," acquiesced Sol. "We tried thet on him last night

on Belle Isle, but it warn't no use. He managed ter wriggle out uv it somehow."

"Vell, now, vill you see Rosa, and geet her somewhere, so I can talk to her to-night? Zen you come up with ze papers to prove ze marriage."

"Does she want it proved?"

"Yes, she would not believe it. I told her when ve vas by ourselves at ze rubber boarding-house zat eet vas not true."

"What in thunder did yer do thet for?" interrupted Sol, with an oath.

"Vell, it vas for my own pleasure. She had signed ma paper, and I thought I had her right, and I wanted her to know how I had fooled her."

"And now she'll fool you. Why, Sondaz, I allers thought ez yer had too much sense ter do er thing like thet."

"Eet vas foolish, I know," agreed Sondaz, humbly. "But, now, Sol, vill you feex it so zat ve can have ze interview at vonce, to-night?"

"What do you want her to do?"

"Geef me a certified check for feefty thousand dollars on a Detroit bank payable to cash so zat I vill haf no trouble. I geef you twenty thousand for your share, and zen I go avay."

"What will you give her for her money?"

"A guarantee zat I vill not interfere with her geeting a divorce."

"That all?"

"No, when I am far avay, I vill send her a confession zat ze marriage vas a mockery, but zat you, who vas ze vitness, deed not know eet. Zat vill let you out."

"Ah!"

"You agree?"

"Wal, an' how 'bout them jewels of hers?"

"We can't get zem."

"We can't, eh? Then I don't go inter ther deal with yer?"

The Mexican looked quickly at his companion to see whether he was in earnest. One glance assured him that he was.

"You not help me because I will not steal ze jewels, eh? You think I am a thief, eh?"

Sol Fixer burst into a hearty fit of laughter.

"Why, Fernando, what d'yer mean? I think you er thief? And you're on yer dignity about it, eh? Well, ef this ain't ther funniest snap! Darn your ugly black picter! Didn't yer steal ther jewels, and warn't yer mad 'cause somebody found 'em in the cellar on ther island an' got 'em back to their owner Mlle. Rosa? You not er thief, eh? Well, I'd like ter know what yer are, then!"

"You ze liar!" hissed the Mexican, as he flew at Sol's throat.

But the other had been watching for a sudden attack, and he threw his assailant off as easily as if he had been a child.

"Quit that, Fernando! It won't do no good!" he said, quietly.

The discomfited ruffian was brushing the ashes off his hat, which had fallen on the now nearly extinguished fire, and he answered sulkily:

"Vny you lie about me, zen?"

"I don't lie about yer, Fernando—at least, not about them thar jewels. Now, hyar is my proposal, an' I won't listen ter no other."

"Go on."

"I'll git Rosa inter Hank Blower's tent after ther show ter-night. Thar won't be no one around 'cept Hank, an' I kin easily fix him ter keep his mouth shut."

"Hank Blower?" asked Sondaz, with a start. He had not forgotten his little tussle with that gentleman at the India-rubber house in the morning.

"Thet's who I said. Oh, yes, I know you an' him hed a little difference. But that don't matter. You quarrel with most everybody, Sondaz. See ther way you jumped on ter me a minute ago. But it didn't do no good."

The Mexican gnashed his teeth, but did not speak. He was keeping silent by a violent effort.

"Wal, ez I wuz sayin'," went on Sol, "I'll hev Rosa in Hank Blower's tent, with Hank thar ez er witness. Then I'll bring you in, an' you kin try what yer like with Rosa."

"Zat vill be safe?"

"What a miserable coward you are," Sondaz, growled Sol, contemptuously, "unless you hev everything in your own favor. Yes, it will be safe. I'll answer for thet."

"Vell, zat vill do."

"Yes, thet will do ez far ez it goes. But yer don't suppose I'm er goin' ter do all thet fer nothin', do yer? My price is—them jewels ez Mlle. Rosa hez in her dressing-room in thet big trunk. You got 'em once, and you must do it again."

"Vell?"

"And then you must give 'em ter me ez my share. Then you kin hev ther whole \$50,000 you get from Rosa fer yerself. Is it er bargain?"

Sondaz turned almost blue in his amazement. It was a few seconds before he could speak. Then the accents came from him huskily and low.

"You vant me to take ze reesk of going to ze circus-tent and take zem jewels just vhen she has got zem back again? Vhy, eet ees reeducu-

lous. I should be putting my head in ze lion's mouth. Vhy, Sol Feexer, you ze crazy man."

He waved his hand as if throwing off something unworthy of serious thought, and felt in his pockets for his cigarette materials. The tobacco and paper were each inclosed in little silver water-tight boxes, and he had no difficulty in making a cigarette and lighting it.

"Wait er minute, Fernando. I'll help yer ter git at them things. I'll manage it so that you kin git inter ther tent while Rosa is in ther ring. She has er dressing-tent ter herself, you know. Wal, I'll git her maid out fer a few minutes on some excuse. Then you must slip in, grab ther shiners—they're in a canvas bag now, I notice—an' I'll meet yer outside. You kin give ther bag ter me, and hide yerself until after ther show. I'll take keer Rosa won't miss ther stones till ther next day."

"Can you do all zat?" asked the Mexican, slowly and thoughtfully.

"Sure!"

"Vell, I'll try it on ze one condition."

"What is it?"

"Gif me zat turquoise and diamond pin."

Sol hesitated. Then he said:

"Wal, you drive er hard bargain, Fernando. But—all right. You kin hev ther pin."

A gleam of triumph lighted up the Mexican's face. He held out his hand to Sol Fixer.

"Never mind 'bout shaking hands, Fernando," said Sol, hastily. "Somehow, I never did like to shake hands with you. But the bargain will hold all right without it. You're not offended, eh? I'm kinder funny 'bout some things."

The hatred that shone in the Mexican's eyes belied his soft voice as he answered, with a shrug:

"Offended? Not I, Sol Feexer. I know you are so—so—foony."

"Wal, let us tramp toward Monroe. You had better drop inter er little hotel I know on ther edge uv ther town whar farmers and drovers git fer the'r fodder. You don't want ter be seen by any uv ther circus people before dark, yer know."

"No. You are ze sensible man, Sol," responded Fernando, as the two walked away from the fire. Adding, under his breath: "But I vill geet ze best of you yet!"

CHAPTER XXV.

WHAT THE OLD FARMER DID.

THE "Travelers' Rest and Farmers' Home" was painted across the front of a white frame house on the pike road that led to Monroe from Detroit. The house was just beyond the town boundaries of Monroe, but was considered part of the town notwithstanding.

It was seven o'clock when Fernando Sondaz swaggered up to the house, trying to look at his ease, but not succeeding very well, for he was miserably conscious that his clothes did not look as well as usual.

There was no one in sight but an old farmer, who sat on a bench outside, smoking a corn-cob pipe, and busy splicing a lash on a heavy black-snake whip.

"Nice evenin'," said the farmer, but without looking up from his absorbing occupation of mending his whip.

"Yees," answered Sondaz, shortly. "Vhere ees ze landlord?"

"Inside, I guess," was the equally short response of the farmer. He was not going to let any city galoot get the best of him.

The Mexican did not take any notice of the old man's evident displeasure, but strolled into the bar-room and looked around him.

No one was to be seen, so he knocked on the bar with his knuckles.

"Ye'd better kick on the door," suggested the old man, from his position on the bench outside.

The Mexican took the old farmer's advice, and kicked on a door leading, as he supposed, into another part of the house.

He had bestowed four or five hearty blows on the lower panel, when the door suddenly opened, and he found himself face to face with—Alice Trevilyan.

The girl was very pale, and she became still paler when Sondaz seized her by the wrist and gave her a shake, apparently for simple malice.

"Whar you been? How you come here, eh?" he hissed, as his eyebrows met in a fierce frown.

"I got off the train at the next station when you—you—jumped, and came back on the next train. There was nothing else for me to do," she said, timidly.

"No, I suppose zat was all you could do," he rejoined, after a moment's reflection. "Vhere is zat scoundrel—zat Hey Rube?"

"How do you suppose I know?"

Sondaz was about to speak again, when the landlady of the tavern, a "fat, fair and forty" widow, came out of the kitchen and bowed politely to the Mexican.

Sondaz responded with an exaggerated bend, that while the extreme of respect to a casual observer, might have been seen, if one had looked closely, to vail considerable mockery.

"Can I hafe some soopper?"

"Yes, sir."

"Zanks, so very mooch!"

The Mexican's politeness was overpowering.

The widow bustled out of the room and in and out of the kitchen, while Sondaz, lighting a cigarette, stood in the doorway watching her, and occasionally glancing at Alice.

At last he beckoned to the girl, and she, after a moment's hesitation, followed him to the front of the house, where the old farmer, having finished the splicing of his whip, had laid it across his knees, and with his corn-cob pipe still between his teeth had dropped into a sound sleep. "Old fellow's tired, eh? So am I," grunted the Mexican.

It was a beautiful evening, the sun just sinking toward the giant tree-tops, and tinging everything with a glow that was still more yellow than crimson.

"Alice," said Sondaz, as soon as they had reached the road before the house, "I am going away."

"Well?"

"And I zink you better go, too."

The girl shrunk back fearfully.

"You not like to go, eh?" he added.

Alice answered him only with a look, but its meaning was unmistakable.

"No, I thought you not want to go, but you moost."

Alice darted a contemptuous glance at him, but he continued, as he smoked calmly:

"Eet ees not safe for me to stay here longer, and I go to Vera Cruz in ze morning. You know zat I take ze property at ze end of ze year unless you marry me, eh?"

"You are married already, are you not?" demanded the girl, her eyes fairly blazing with indignation.

"Yes, but I will soon be deevorced."

The devilish smile that played around his lips made Alice long to strike him to the earth.

"Fernando Sondaz, you can do what you will, but I will not go with you, and as for marrying you, I would sooner marry a snake!"

"Vell, then, zat is vhat I want to know. Ze vill says zat I haf ze property eef you not marry me, except a part zat goes to ze boy, Tim, your brother. Eef you do marry me, he geet mooch more than if you do not. So! Vell, eef you die and he die I geet ze whole of et, see?"

While talking the two had walked mechanically along the road, which wound sharply to the right, so that the hotel was hidden by a thick plantation of pines.

"Now, suppose you vas to die, eh?"

"What do you mean?" cried the girl, as a new terror filled her.

The Mexican's dark eyes, glittering in the light of the setting sun, looked absolutely demoniacal.

"Nozzing! I only say zat eef you die, I geet ze half of ze fortune, and eef Tim die too, I geet ze whole of eet. So!"

He delicately rolled another cigarette, watching her furtively the while to see what effect his words had had upon her.

"Fernando Sondaz, do you mean murder?"

He shrugged his shoulders deprecatingly.

"No. Zat ees not ma beezness. Murder! Ah! No! Zat ees a dangerous work."

"But—"

"But," he repeated, "I moost haf ze money, somehow. I want you to come vith me—"

"I will not."

"Ah! No! Vell, then, you sign a paper saying you vill not marry me, and geeving up all claim to your share of your father's estate, and I vill geef you \$10,000. Zen you vill haf zat and Tim's share, and leeve like a lady until some one marry you. *Caramba!* I not like you marrying some one else, for I lofe you, but I moost haf ze money."

The girl had been looking up and down the road during the Mexican's speech, as if seeking a means of escape. As already noted, she could not see far in the direction they had come, the thicket of pines bordering the road at the turn hiding the hotel entirely from them. Down the other way was a long avenue of dusty road, bordered for a considerable distance by the pines, which there gave way to a meadow on the right and the thick forest on the left.

"Vell, vat you say?" went on Sondaz. "You moost do something. I haf no time to waste."

The loud clanging of a bell sounded on the other side of the pine thicket.

"There is your supper at the hotel. You had better go there, and talk about this afterward," suggested Alice.

The Mexican winked, and his face broke into a cunning smile.

"No, I not haf ma soopper until zis ees all settled. Ze soopper can wait."

The girl, with an effort to shake off the deadly fear that always oppressed her in the presence of Sondaz, looked him full in the eyes, and desperately declared:

"Fernando, I don't know what arts you used with my dear father to influence him for your advantage. I only know that you did do so, or tried to."

"Tried! Yes, I tried!" interrupted Sondaz, with his snaky smile.

"But, let me tell you, once for all," continued the girl, not noticing the interruption, "that I will never enter into any compact with you. At the end of the year you can take what you say you are entitled to. In the mean time, I

will live on as I am now. I am safe in the care of Hank Blower, and I never want to see you again."

She turned and moved toward the pines, on her way to the hotel.

Sondaz seized her by the wrist.

"Stop!" he said. "You cannot geet away from me so easy."

Alice looked at him unflinchingly, as she struggled to release herself.

"Let go of my wrist, or I'll scream!" she said, in a suppressed voice.

In a second he had forced a handkerchief into her mouth and commenced to drag her into the thicket.

Vainly she writhed and pulled in efforts to get out of his power.

He held her as in a vise.

"Now, Alice, though I lofe you, yet I want money more than I want you," he whispered, as he dragged her further into the thicket.

He threw her down and kneeling on her prostrate form, took from his sleeve the long dirk that seemed so suited to his murderous hand.

Alice closed her eyes. There was not the vestige of pity in the Mexican's eyes, and she felt that her time had come.

He drew forth the dirk deliberately and looked it up and down.

"So!" he muttered. "Eet ees ma best friend. It never misses fire! *Caramba!* Eet ees good!"

He looked around him and listened.

Not a sight or sound in that quiet spot but the red light of the setting sun on the dark green pines, and the chirp of a pair of blue-birds circling above the trees.

But these signs of nature in her most beautified moods had no humanizing effect upon the murderous wretch who held his keen weapon over the helpless girl.

He was just about to plunge the weapon into her heart with one swift, sure blow, when a sudden thought struck him.

"No! Zat vill not do," he muttered. "Eet moost be ze suicide when zey find her. No one saw her go out wiz me. I vill haf ma soopper as if nozzing had happened. Zen, *Caramba!* I vill go away, and no one vill be able to say I did it. So!"

He put his dirk back in his sleeve. He had noticed a small dagger in the girl's belt, the weapon being part of the Circassian girl's dress that she still wore.

He took the knife in his hand and examined it. It was as keen as his own dirk.

"So! Now I vill strike vith my left hand. Zen it vill look more like ze suicide, especially eef I put ze knife into her right hand! *Caramba!* Fernando! You smart boy! So!"

The gleaming dagger waved aloft for a second. Then it came down aiming straight at the girl's heart.

"*Caramba!*"

His neck was in the powerful grasp of two hands that seemed determined to choke him, while at the same instant a boy ran out of an opening in the pine thicket before him and helped Alice to her feet.

"Dear Tim!" she murmured, and fainted.

By this time a pair of handcuffs had rendered the Mexican helpless, as the old farmer who had been sitting outside the hotel, and whose hands had nearly choked the Mexican, gave him an admonitory cut with the blacksnake whip.

"*Caramba!* You cussed old hayseed, eh?"

"Not exactly," responded a cheery voice, that seemed somehow incongruous, coming, as it did, from the old farmer's mouth. "I am a gentleman you know as Hey Rube!"

And pulling off his large, shapeless straw hat and gray wig, the detective nodded playfully at his scowling prisoner.

CHAPTER XXVI.

SONDAZ IN DANGEROUS COMPANY.

THE circus was in full swing when Hey Rube and Tim brought Fernando Sondaz a prisoner to the rear of the tent in which the animals forming the menagerie were pacing up and down in their cages.

The roar of a lion and the impatient snarl of the Royal Bengal tiger whose escapade in Detroit the reader will remember, broke sullenly through the lively music of the adjoining circus-tent, and did not help to make the Mexican's situation any pleasanter to him.

Alice walked slowly behind the trio.

As they all stopped at the rear entrance to the menagerie tent, the girl looked inquiringly at Hey Rube.

"Go to Hank Blower," suggested the detective, in response, "and make your peace with him. Tell him that I will be there later in the evening. The show stays two days here in Monroe, so he won't have any packing up to do to-night."

As Alice obediently departed, Hey Rube, who had handcuffed himself to Sondaz, with the additional precaution of securing the prisoner's hands with another pair of handcuffs, pulled up the tent-flap, and dragged him into the menagerie.

The audience had passed through the animal part of the entertainment, and being now at

the circus, would not be allowed to come into the menagerie again. Consequently, many of the lights had been extinguished, and the large tent looked dismal enough to give the most joyful individual the blues.

"Who's thar?" demanded some one from behind the royal tiger's cage.

"Hallo, Jim Swan, that you?" was Hey Rube's response.

"Hey Rube! That you? Well, I'll be darned! Whar did you come from?" asked Jim Swan, coming out of his retirement. "Who hev yer with yer?"

"A friend of yours. Bring your lantern over."

Swan crossed the tent with a large stable lantern in his hand, which he swung in the Mexican's face.

"Thet or'nary cuss, Fernando Sondaz!" he ejaculated, in astonishment.

"Yes, safe at last, Jim," said the detective.

"Now, I want a place to put him."

"I kin accommodate yer with ther very thing you want," answered Jim Swan, with a grin at the raging Mexican.

"Where?"

"Wait a minute and I'll show yer. I suppose you want a place that is light an' airy an' retired—strictly private, in fact, eh?"

"Yes."

"And so fixed that the senor will be willin' ter stay thar till you invite him out, eh?"

"Yes."

"Well, bring ther gentleman this way."

"Come, senor," said Hey Rube, as he followed Jim across the tent.

The prisoner had no choice but to obey, for he was fastened to the detective.

"*Caramba!* I vill geet ma revenge yet!" he hissed, savagely.

"Perhaps," responded the detective.

"Perhaps? I vill!"

"What are yer grunting about, yer black brute?" broke in Jim Swan.

"*Caramba!*" snarled Sondaz.

Jim Swan took no notice of this expletive. He was standing in front of the royal tiger's cage, waiting for the others to come up.

"Thar, what d'ye think uv that?" he asked, as he pointed to the cage.

"A fine tiger! I am not likely to forget him, either, any more than you are," answered Rube. "He made it lively enough for us in Detroit last night."

"Thet ain't what I mean. What d'ye think uv ther cage?"

He pointed out that the cage was divided into two compartments by a wooden partition. In one was the Royal Bengal tiger. The other was empty.

"Excellent, Jim! Excellent!" cried Rube, delightedly. "It will make a very nice resting-place for him for a few hours."

"*Caramba!*"

Jim Swan opened the iron door of the empty compartment, and threw in a quantity of clean straw.

"Thar, he kin lie down on thet straw an' sleep ez comfortable ez if he wuz in a first-class hotel," he remarked, as he stood back to survey his work.

"You make me lie in zat cage like ze wild beasts, eh?" spluttered Sondaz.

"Wal, you are er wild beast, ain't yer?" rejoined Jim Swan, as he pushed the straw to one corner with a pitchfork.

Hey Rube meanwhile was unfastening the manacles that bound him to the Mexican, without taking the least notice of the latter's unwillingness to go into the cage.

"There! Now, Sondaz, step in. Jim, put that box where our friend can use it for a step-ladder. That's right. So! In you go!"

The Mexican found himself in the cage, with Jim Swan fastening the grated door with a strong iron bar and padlock.

"You not leave zese zings on me, eh?" asked Sondaz, putting forth his hands, that were still handcuffed together.

"No; I guess we can trust you to have your hands free now."

So saying, Hey Rube reached through the bars of the cage and unlocked the manacles, taking them away and putting them in his pocket.

The first use the Mexican made of his comparative freedom was to feel mechanically up his sleeve for his dirk, that he had rescued from the vacant lot by the side of the India-rubber house when it had been thrown through the window, and that, as we have seen, he had brought into requisition more than once since.

Hey Rube saw the movement and smiled.

"You have overlooked the fact that I took this little instrument away from you, eh?" he said, as he drew the dirk from a belt under his coat and held it up before the cage.

"*Caramba!*"

Sondaz felt in his pockets for something else, and this time successfully. He took out his cigarette materials and rolled himself a cigarette.

He was about to light it when, as he looked about the cage, he shrugged his shoulders in so expressive a manner that Jim Swan divined at once what he wanted.

"Can he hev er stool, Rube?"

"Yes."

A three-legged, low stool, was handed in, and the prisoner, seating himself upon it, lighted his cigarette and smoked with his customary *sang froid*, as if quite reconciled to his position.

"A cool cuss!" commented Hey Rube, inwardly, as he turned away. "Tim."

"Yes."

"We'd better go into the other tent. It is nearly time for your act, isn't it? I shall not go on to-night myself. I expect Sol has fixed the programme without me, anyhow. But with you, it is a different matter. I know that you are not fit to go into the ring, but you must get through somehow."

"All right, Rube. I'll do anything you say," answered the boy, readily, as he and the detective left the tent by the rear entrance together.

The Mexican watched them depart, and then his busy brain began to devise some means of escape.

He realized that he had forged fresh chains for himself by the bold games he had played during the past twenty-four hours, and if he did not get out of the hands of Hey Rube quickly, he would only have the tiger's cage for a prison cell. Why the detective did not at once turn him over to the authorities he did not know, but he rightly conjectured that he was being kept in the menagerie until more evidence of his wickedness could be brought against him.

He saw that Jim Swan, tired as he was, had stretched himself upon a cot-bed in the middle of the tent, and, with a large bull-mastiff lying by his side, had shut his eyes, and was even now almost asleep. Like most men whose rest is often broken, he enjoyed the faculty of sleeping soundly at any time of the day or night.

"Caramba! I geet out of thees, or my name not Fernando Sondaz!" hissed the Mexican, as he rolled another cigarette and lighted it at the ashes of the first. He always found that smoking assisted his invention.

Two other menagerie assistants, having finished their work of feeding and watering the animals, were also sleeping on their cots near Jim Swan, and in fact had been doing so during the colloquy of Rube with the latter. They were too used to talk and other noises in their vicinity to get up unless they were called.

The two elephants, fastened to stakes by chains around their feet, stood quietly by, and the camels were kneeling, with their eyes shut, in another part of the tent. Even the wild animals were mostly, except the hyenas, who kept up their nervous tramp up and down their cage, after the manner of their kind.

"So! All asleep. Now for ze investigation!"

He first tried the barred door; merely as a matter of form, however, for he knew that it would be impossible to get out that way. Then he shook the bars separately and individually to discover whether mayhap there was a loose one anywhere.

"All tight! Caramba! I expected eet!"

The back and sides of the cage were of wood, very thick and strong, the partition that divided him from the tiger being of the same nature.

"Ah!"

The ejaculation was the result of something that had suddenly caught his eye.

An iron bar was fitted into large staples on the wooden door of the partition, and apparently formed its only fastening.

"Caramba! Perhaps zis may let me out!"

Carefully and noiselessly he slipped the bar out of the staples, and opening the door an inch or two peered into the tiger's den.

The huge animal was lying asleep at the other end, close to the front bars, and within two feet of the barred door.

The Mexican looked at the mighty bulk of the creature, noted the great sharp, cruel claws, and the white fangs disclosed by the partly open mouth.

He shut the door, barred it softly and went back to his stool.

"Caramba! Ze risk ees too great. I cannot do eet. I vill haf a smoke!"

Another cigarette was made, lighted and consumed, and then, with an air of determination, he went to the door, removed the bar, which he kept in his hand, and stepped softly, but boldly, into the tiger's compartment.

The animal's eyes were still closed.

Like a cat the Mexican crept to the barred door. As he thought, it was secured only by a stout bar in a socket, but was not padlocked.

Only let the tiger refrain from interfering with him, and he could take out this bar easily from the inside, and escape.

Holding the bar from the inner door ready for defense in case of need, he reached the front of the cage, and gently lifted the bar.

It was somewhat rusty, and it required more strength to move it than he had anticipated.

The tiger slept on.

Ah! The bar was moving at last. He lifted it out of the socket at the bottom, and then allowed it to drop from that as the top.

In his eagerness he lost some of his caution,

and made a slight noise as he took the bar out and drawing it into the cage, laid it on the floor.

He was about to push open the barred door, when the tiger opened his eyes, and, with a growl, arose to his feet, standing immediately before the door at the front of the den.

The Mexican, livid with terror, ran to the opposite corner of the cage. He could not escape into his own compartment for the tiger blocked the way. The two iron bars lay right under the feet of the animal.

What was he to do? If he shouted for help to Jim Swan it might infuriate the tiger and cause him to make an instant attack, besides precluding the possibility of his ultimate escape, even if he escaped the tiger's teeth and claws.

The tiger, apparently more surprised than anything else, stood motionless save for the gentle swaying of its tail and the nervous moving of its fiery eyeballs.

At this moment Jim Swan, in turning over on his narrow cot-bed, very nearly fell off, thus waking himself. From mere instinct, he glanced in the direction of the tiger's cage, and understood the case in a second.

"Keep quite still thar. Don't shout and don't move, or you're a dead man," said Jim, in quiet tones, as he stood up and picked up an iron bar about four feet long.

He approached the cage by a roundabout way so as not to disturb the animal, which never took its eyes off the Mexican, and, unlocking the door of the empty compartment, stepped inside, pad-locking the door behind him.

The tiger, as we have seen, was in such a position as to bar the Mexican's egress by either door.

Jim Swan, without the least hesitation, went through the opening between the two compartments, and gave the tiger a tremendous poke with the iron bar.

The animal with a snarl retreated to his corner, and Swan shouted to Sondaz to run into the other room.

The Mexican needed no second bidding. He had flown through the door and shut it in an instant, leaving Jim Swan, with his iron bar in his hand to settle matters with the tiger.

CHAPTER XXVII.

WHY SOL DID NOT STRIKE.

HEY RUBE and Tim got into the performers' room of the big circus-tent just as Sol Fixer, looking around it, was inquiring angrily for Tim.

"I ain't seen the boy since ther afternoon performance. If he ain't hyar to attend ter his beezness ter-night I'll make it hot for him, now you bet!"

"No occasion, Sol. The boy is here. I'll be answerable for him."

"Oh, you're hyar, are yer, Rube? Wal, it's er pity you don't do what you're paid for er little better than you do. You know the show don't hev ez many principal acts as it oughter."

[For the information of the reader, it may be said that horseback riding is known as a "principal" act, in the vernacular of the circus ring.]

"I am attending to my busines, Sol Fixer, and you know it," rejoined the detective.

"Wal, that's all right. I don't want ter quarrel with yer 'bout it. Tim, you'd better git into yer ring togs right smart. You may hav ter do an extra turn ter-night, now Rube is off."

This was a malicious dig at Hey Rube, but he allowed it to pass. It was not his desire to have trouble with Sol Fixer—at present.

Tim went to the dressing-room, and Sol Fixer returned to the ring.

He had been able to escape for a few moments while a trapeze performance had been taking place, which could go on without the aid of the ringmaster.

"Mademoiselle Rosa!" he called, a moment later, and the girl came from her dressing-room in short, gauzy skirts, to do her bare-back riding act.

The girl bounded into the ring, and Sol assisted her to the back of her horse.

Around she went, while Bud banged away at his big drum, and the rest of the band played vigorously.

Sol was looking anxiously among the audience for Sondaz.

"Whar is thet cuss, I wonder?" he thought.

"Ef he goes back on his bargain now, it will be ther worse for him. I've got her out uv ther dressing-room, and it's ther easiest thing in ther world ter slip in thar now."

At this moment he noticed that Munch Jones, as clown, was not in the ring.

With a muttered oath, he rushed into the performers' tent, where he met the clown just coming out of the dressing-room.

"Git inter ther ring, or I'll fine yer a dollar. D'ye hear, you skulking rascal?" he hissed.

The clown did not answer, but, with his toughest walk, and his soft high hat pulled down over his forehead, marched into the ring, and bowed gravely in response to the applause with which he was greeted. Munch Jones had made himself popular already with the audiences, who all thought that his natural tough manner was assumed for their especial gratification.

Sol Fixer slipped out of the ring and made his

way to Mlle. Rosa's dressing-room. The maid was busy putting away the dresses with which Rosa had finished for the evening.

She looked up as Sol entered, but recognizing him at once, went on with her work, regardless of his presence.

As manager, Fixer could go anywhere about the tents to see that everything was all right, though of course he was expected not to intrude upon the privacy of members of the troupe.

"Marie!"

"Sir?"

"I want yer ter go ter ther door of the big tent and look at Mademoiselle Rosa's hair. I'm afraid it's come down. Ef it does, it might make her miss her tip, and come down off her horse head-first. If thar is anything wrong with it, tell me, an' I'll make an excuse fer her ter git out uv ther ring fer a minute while you fix it. See?"

"Lor bless me! I hope it's all right, sir. I did it up as carefully as I could," answered the maid, as she left the dressing-tent in a hurry, Sol Fixer following her.

He saw her lift the flap of the big tent and peep in. Then he hastened back to the dressing tent and looked around stealthily.

"Curse thet thar Mexican. He has gone back on me, sure. Wal, I'll do ther job myself, as sure ez my name's Sol Fixer. One thing is certain: ef I do ther work, I'll make it so lively fer thet thar Sondaz that he'll be sorry he ever played di't on Sol Fixer."

The trunk in which he knew Mlle. Rosa kept her valuables was wide open, and his eyes glistened with cupidity as he noted the rich silks and stuffs that were piled up higgledy-piggledy over the lid and the sides of the large receptacle.

"Where was Rube Rocket?"

This was the question that Sol Fixer asked himself, as he looked anxiously about him.

Since Sol had gone into the ring he had missed the detective, and he never felt safe unless he knew where Rube was—or rather where he was not.

"Darn his picter! Wal, I'll hev ter take chances. What with ther Mexican and Rube, I guess I hev mor'n my share uv trouble!"

Sol Fixer assumed an injured expression as he thus soliloquized. He really did think that the world was disposed to treat him unfairly.

He was by the side of the trunk by this time, when a sudden thought struck him. A long dressing-robe, with a train, hung from the pole in the middle of the little dressing-tent, and over it was suspended a black mask, with lace to hang over the mouth. It was a costume that Mlle. Rosa occasionally wore in her *manege* act.

In a twinkling Sol was arrayed in the robe and mask, chucking to himself as he thought that, even if he should be seen in the tent, no one would recognize him.

He had looked out of the dressing-tent and saw that Marie, the maid, was intently watching the performance in the ring, and was evidently good for ten minutes yet. Sol had foreseen this probability when he sent her away. He knew the girl pretty well, and was sure that, once looking at the entertainment, she would not come back until she was obliged.

"Whar in thunder is thet bag?" he grumbled.

He was hastily turning over the contents of the trunk, his big, rough hands looking strangely out of place among the delicate finery of a fastidious girl.

"Ah, hyar it is!"

He could hardly repress a shout of delight as he drew forth the canvas-bag containing the jewels. He opened it, and looked in.

Yes, there they were—a prince's ransom! Sol Fixer hugged himself. Then opening his military coat under the robe, he put the bag in, and looked around to see that the coast was clear for his escape.

"Thunder! Hyar's Rosa coming!"

His situation was an awkward one. He could not possibly go through the doorway into the performers' tent without meeting Rosa and her maid face to face.

But one way was open to him, and that he took without hesitation.

Drawing out the bowie-knife that he had carried since his adventures on Belle Isle, he hastily cut the ropes that held the tent down to two of the toe-stakes, and crawled under the canvas, robe, mask, canvas-bag and all, just as Mlle. Rosa and Marie entered the room from the performers' tent.

"Whew! Thet wuz er durned close shave!" gasped Sol, as he stood up outside the tent and removed the mask so that he could wipe his face on the handkerchief that he had procured in place of the blue silk article that he had used on Munch Jones on Belle Isle.

There was no time to waste, however. He dropped the robe from his shoulders, and bundling up the bag of jewelry in it, carried the whole package to a heap of canvas that was ready for repairing the tents in case of accidents, and that was kept at the rear of one of the side-show tents.

"It'll be safe thar fer an hour. Then, after

ther show, I kin take it away!" he muttered, as he hastened into the performers' tent.

The orchestra had been playing an overture between the first and second parts of the entertainment, so that he had not been missed by the audience.

"What are yer doin' thar?" he inquired gruffly of the clown, as he saw him sitting near the door looking out into the night. "Don't yer know ez it's very unprofessional to put yerself whar outsiders kin see yer when ye'r not in ther ring? Seems to me, Munch Jones, ez if yer won't never learn no sense."

Jones seemed to be in a sullen humor, for he did not answer.

Sol, with a contemptuous twist of his countenance, passed on.

"He ain't got over ther trick I played on him on Belle Isle last night. Wal, he'll hev ter git over it, and right quick, too, or I'll bounce him, ez sure ez his name's Munch Jones."

I he could have seen the expression in the clown's eye at this moment, he might have been disposed to discharge him instantly, for there was threatening hatred in the glance, if ever glance conveyed such a sentiment in this world.

"Oh, my trunk! I have been robbed! Marie! Mr. Fixer!" came from Mlle. Rosa's dressing-room, and then the girl herself burst into the performers' room in a terrible state of excitement.

"What's ther matter, Rosa?" asked Sol Fixer.

"My jewels! They're gone again!"

"Wal, don't excite yerself. Who d'ye suspect?"

"I don't know! They were taken just now while I was in the ring."

"Who was in the dressing-room?" broke in Bud, who had just come down from the bandstand. There was nothing for him to do in the piece that was now being played, which was an oboe solo, and which always got at least one encore.

At Bud's question, there was a general movement of anxiety among the performers who had come in from their dressing-rooms at the sound of Mlle. Rosa's outcry. This trouble concerned everybody connected with the circus. Suspicion might fall in any direction.

"Who was in the dressing-room?" repeated Mlle. Rosa thoughtfully.

"Yes."

"Why, let me see, no one except Marie."

"Oh, mademoiselle!" cried Marie, her eyes filling with tears.

"Why, my poor child! You don't suppose I suspect you, do you?" said Rosa, kindly, putting her hand on her maid's shoulder with a caressing touch that was all her own.

"Wal, I dunno!" observed Sol, in his brutal way. "Yer can't 'most allers tell!"

"Yes, yer can, Mr. Fixer. Yer can always tell! That girl didn't steal those jewels, and it's a blooming shame to say she did. If you weren't a mean sort of cove, you'd never try to put it on her. That's what I say, and my blooming name is Budworth Buddicombe, Esq., formerly of Shoreditch, London, but now a citizen of the United States of America. So help me 'tater!"

And Bud gave a tremendous bang at his big drum (which, of course, he had brought down with him from the bandstand), to emphasize his declaration of principles.

Sol shot a look at Bud as if he would have annihilated him on the spot, but the latter held his heavy drumstick ready to repel any attack, and as it was evident that the dozen or so of performers standing behind him were ready to take Bud's part, he wisely concluded that this was not the time or place to correct the base drummer's plain speaking.

"Wal, Mademoiselle Rosa, ez it seems no one wuz in your dressing-room but yerself and yer maid, an' neither uv you took ther property, I suppose you must hev mislaid 'em. Everybody ready for ther second part!" he shouted, in his official tones. "We can't give no more time ter this thing now."

"Mademoiselle Rosa!" said Marie, who had been thinking quietly during the last half-minute.

"Well?"

"Mr. Fixer came to the dressing-room."

"What?" he exclaimed angrily.

"You know you came to me to tell me that Mademoiselle Rosa's hair was falling down."

"Wal wasn't it?"

"No. But that isn't what I was going to say. You were in the dressing-room, weren't you?"

Mademoiselle Rosa looked sternly at the ringmaster, but he did not quail, as he answered:

"No, I did not go inside. I followed yer to ther entrance to ther ring-tent right away."

"Liar!"

A deep, guttural voice, evidently disguised, uttered this word—softly, indeed, but with bitter emphasis.

Sol turned quickly. The others, apparently, did not notice it.

Everybody looked innocent, and Sol could not see one who was likely to have applied such an epithet to him.

He glanced through the half-open flap that hid the doorway leading to the outside of the tent. Then, with a howl that he tried in vain

to repress, he rushed through the doorway, leaving the other occupants of the performers' tent gazing after him in blank astonishment.

"Cuss yer, Munch Jones! I've hed it in my mind ter wipe yer out afore, an' I'll do it now, ef I hang for it!" he hissed, as he scudded across the circus ground and around to the menagerie-tent.

A white figure was hastening in the same direction, several yards before him, and he knew it to be the clown, Munch Jones.

The clown went straight to the pile of canvas under which the bag of jewelry was hidden.

"Cuss him! He must have seen me put it thar. Wal, it wuz er bad thing for him when he undertook ter chase around after Sol Fixer!"

The clown had just pulled out the robe, mask and jewels, and was examining them, as if not quite certain, when Sol Fixer seized him by the arm with his left hand, and raised his bowie with his right.

To throw him off was for the clown the work of a second. Then he turned and looked at Sol, the moonlight falling full upon the whitened face, with its grotesque daubs of red.

Sol's bowie-knife nearly dropped from his hand, and his legs shook as if with palsy.

The clown, with his precious bundle, ran back to the performers' tent, and without a word, placed the lost jewels and robe in the hands of Mlle. Rosa.

"My jewels! Where—where—did you get them, Mr. Jones?"

"Yes, whar did you get them, Munch?" added Fixer, who, recovering himself, had arrived in the tent by this time, and was as cool as usual.

"Where I got them, Sol Fixer, you know as well as any one," returned the clown, sternly, "as well as you know that my name is not Munch Jones, but Reuben Rocket!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MUNCH MAKES HIMSELF USEFUL.

We left Jim Swan in a rather awkward situation in the tiger's den.

To be alone with a Bengal tiger in his native jungle, even when upon an elephant's back, with rifles and other weapons ready to hand, is not the pleasantest thing in the world, as many a tiger-hunter has testified. But to be fastened up in a little cage, with the tiger so close that you feel his hot, fetid breath on your cheek, is a hundred times worse.

Jim Swan, however, was not the man to be demoralized because he found himself at a disadvantage.

Grasping his iron bar in both hands, he thought over his plan of attack as calmly as if he were lying on his cot outside, arranging a battle for some one else, in whom he had no personal interest.

"Ef ther cuss once gits on top uv me, I'm er gone Swan," he muttered. "He's ez ugly ez he kin be ter-night, too."

He was afraid to take his eyes off those of the tiger for an instant. He knew that if he did the brute would spring, and there was no possible means of avoiding him in this narrow space.

"I might wake some uv thar boys, perhaps, but it wouldn't do no good. They're all green hands, an' they would only stir him up an' make him more savage than he is. Then it would be good-by for me."

The tiger, meanwhile, standing across both doors, was waving his tail slowly to and fro, as a cat does while watching a mouse's hole. Jim Swan knew that this meant trouble for him before he got out, and he prepared himself for a deadly struggle, from which he might or might not emerge alive, just as it happened.

"It ain't no use waitin' fer him ter commence. I'd better start ther fun myself," he muttered.

With the iron bar in both hands, he poised it so that the end was exactly opposite the tiger's half-open mouth.

Suddenly, he ran forward. His aim was a true one. The bar went into the brute's mouth and staggered him for a second.

But only for a second! With a growl that made the Mexican in the next department quake, the tiger closed his mighty teeth on the bar, and wrenched it from the hand of his adversary.

Jim Swan leaped nimbly to the other side of the cage. The change in the relative positions of himself and the tiger had brought the man a little nearer to the barred door, but still he could not get close enough to escape that way.

The tiger was apparently a little mystified by this maneuver on the part of Swan. Still holding the bar in his teeth, he turned a little and again faced his assailant.

Swan seized the end of the bar and tried to push it down the tiger's throat.

While those strong yellow teeth held the iron he might as well have tried to push it through the armor plate of a modern man-of-war!

"Cuss him! He's strong!" spluttered Jim Swan.

Strangely enough, there was but little of fear in his feelings now. He was simply mad.

"Caramba!" exclaimed a terrified voice from the other part of the cage.

"Shut yer black mouth, will yer?" yelled Jim Swan. "Hyar am I shovin' an' fightin' an'

sweatin' with a gol-darned tiger, an' you stay in thar an' say 'Caramba!' You make me tired."

"Vell, ze door ees shut, and he cannot geet in to zis room. So I try ze cigarrito! It vill help me enjoy ze battle."

The Mexican tried to say this in his accustomed nonchalant manner, but he could not help betraying in his trembling tones that he was very frightened. But he rolled a cigarette and lighted it nevertheless. He had—or thought he had—found that smoking gave him courage when in a dangerous situation.

Jim Swan did not reply to him. He had too much business on his hands with the tiger.

By this time, the animals in the other cages had discovered with the instinct natural to wild beasts, that there was a fight in progress, and they roared, growled and moved uneasily about their cages in sympathy with the conflict.

One of the tent-men turned over on his cot and half-asleep, grumbled at the noise, but satisfied that nothing was the matter as long as Jim Swan did not call him, composed himself to slumber again, without even opening his eyes.

Jim Swan put all his strength into the iron bar and shoved it against the tiger with such force that it slipped a little through his teeth.

This infuriated the brute, for snatching the bar from Swan, he shook it violently and his adversary had enough to do to keep out of his way. At last the tiger threw the bar down in the corner behind him, and Swan found himself weaponless, face to face with a tiger who was waxing more wrathful every instant.

His only chance was activity! He had given up his original idea of taking the aggressive. The only weapon he had was one that he could not use except in the most extreme danger, and then it was not likely to be effective. It was his revolver.

More than once he had put his hand behind him to make sure that it was safe in his hip-pocket, but he knew too much about the money value of a royal Bengal tiger, full-grown, to think of shooting one down hastily.

Al! What was his tigership about to do?

He was crawling along, crouched almost to the floor, with that ominous tail still gently oscillating, and with the greenish-yellow eyes emitting glints of light as they followed the man about the cage.

Slowly came the tiger forward, and slowly retreated the man backward.

Jim Swan drew his revolver. It was a self-cocker, and carried a very heavy bullet. It would not be likely to restrain the tiger, however, unless it happened to strike a vital part. But Swan recognized the fact that he might soon be glad to take any and every chance for his life.

The cunning of the beast was shown by his moving only in such a way that Swan could not get to either of the doors without squeezing past him.

Swan noted this, and, in spite of his danger, could not help paying a mental tribute to the tiger's "smartness," as he called it.

A rustle, a peculiar "swish," and the tiger was in the air.

Not so quickly, however, but that Swan managed to step aside just out of the animal's clutch when he alighted. The latter had not had quite as much room for his spring as he required, and his aim had not been exactly true. This, as well as Swan's agility, may have had something to do with the man's escape.

With a roar of baffled rage, the tiger turned upon his enemy again.

Swan entrenched himself in a corner, and pistol in hand, had made up his mind that it was a question of the tiger's life or his own.

"I s'pose I may ez well finish him ef I kin. It's no use makin' two bites uv er cherry. I'll take him right back of his left shoulder ef I kin. That'll fetch his heart an' keel him over," said Jim to himself in his business-like way.

"Well, now, say! What's all dis yer? Seems as if dere is a show for a man to do something, ain't dey?" yelled a voice that sounded very sweet to Jim Swan at this juncture.

An individual, with his hat tilted over his eyes, his elbows squared, and his chin protruding, had pushed his way into the tent, and was swaggering toward the tiger's cage with a most laughable assumption of dignity.

He saw the nature of the trouble at a glance, and swaggering over to the elephants he picked up a thick iron bar, spiked and fitted with a barbed hook upon the end, which was used for guiding and training elephants, their thick hides being impervious to a more gentle implement.

"Now, den, Mister Tiger, jist look out, for here's a man coming to fix der trouble. Oh, jist show me a tiger! Dat's all I want. Jist show him to me!"

Munch Jones—for of course it was he—swaggered about the tent for a few seconds in his toughest manner, apparently to get himself into good fighting trim, and then, with a whoop of demoniacal power, ran at the royal tiger's cage and stabbed the animal in the side with the elephant-hook.

The suddenness and ferocity of the attack completely demoralized the tiger. He howled

like a whipped puppy. Then, retreating to the back of his cage, he lay down and licked his wound, whining pitifully the while.

"Well done, Munch!" shouted Jim Swan, as he ran to the barred door, opened it and jumped from the cage.

"Caramba! You escape, eh?" exclaimed Sondaz, coming to the front of his apartment, with his cigarette in his mouth.

"Halloa, Jim! Got another tiger in dere? I'd like to give him one wid der elephant hook!" said Munch Jones, as he saw the Mexican.

"No, let him alone. He'll git it after awhile."

"Oh, but, jist let me give him one—only one, wid dis," begged Munch, holding up the elephant-hook, and making his chin stick out most alarmingly.

"No, I tell yer. Ain't thet enough?"

"Well, let me go in dere wid me bare fists and give it to him, won't yer?"

"Let me go in an' blot him off der earth!"

"No!"

"All right. Don't git mad about it. Only, now I've licked der tiger, I'd like ter have a little recreation killin' a thing like dat wid der cigarette in his mouth," grumbled Munch, as he swaggered up and down like a drunken gladiator.

Jim Swan did not answer. He had taken a very heavy blacksnake whip from a trunk by the side of his cot, and was now opening the door of the tiger's cage.

"What are you going to do, Jim?" asked Munch, aghast.

"Nothin' particular," was Swan's cool reply.

He stepped into the den, fastening the door carefully. Then he picked up the lar that secured the door between the two compartments, and handing it to the Mexican, told him to make the communicating door secure. Sondaz obeyed with alacrity. He had forgotten that the door was unfastened during the struggle between Swan and the tiger.

"Now, git out o' thet!" commanded Swan, as he walked up to the animal and gave him a savage cut with the whip.

"Jim!" remonstrated Munch.

"Caramba!" exclaimed Sondaz.

The tiger sprang to his feet as he received the blow, but quailed beneath the eye of Swan, who maintained a determined attitude, with the whip upraised.

Swan had been an animal-trainer for many years, and he knew that now he had succeeded in getting the tiger thoroughly cowed, nothing remained but to make the conquest a permanent one.

He brought the whip down again upon the tiger's back, following it up with a sound thrashing that the animal would not forget for the rest of his life.

At last his arm being thoroughly tired, Swan stopped his discipline, and walking out of the cage, left in it a tiger with no more spirit than the human wretch who shared the den with him.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE TONGUE OF FATE.

It was twelve o'clock on the same night that several people might have been seen assembled in Hank Blower's curiosity tent.

The circus entertainment was over, and the performers having assumed the habiliments of every-day life, were thinking about retiring for the night. The tent-men, grooms and other laborers, having seen that the tents were safe and the animals properly fed and lodged, were already asleep in the dormitory tent, except such as were not needed to remain on the ground, and had gone into the circus sleeping-cars at the station.

Mr. Blower's living curiosities, such as the fat lady, living skeleton, the learned pig, etc., had retired.

Alice Trevilyan, who was only an imitation curiosity in the shape of a "Circassian Beauty," was still up, and was sitting in the large arm-chair generally occupied by the fat lady.

The other occupants of the tent were Mlle. Rosa, Tim, Budworth Buddicombe, Munch Jones, Jim Swan, Hey Rube, Fernando Sondaz, and Hank Blower himself.

The Mexican was manacled and fastened to Hey Rube in the same way that he was escorted to the menagerie but a few hours before.

The party were all grouped around a table—some sitting, and some standing—upon which was a box that Sondaz recognized at once as having been on the table in the India-rubber house in Detroit during his interview with Mlle. Rosa.

"Caramba! Why you brought me to zis place, eh?" demanded the Mexican, in a low voice, of the detective.

"Don't be impatient, senor, and you will soon know all about it," replied Hey Rube, in the same tone.

"I not want to come here."

"No? I thought you were to meet Sol Fixer here after the show," exclaimed Hey Rube, in surprise.

"How you know that?"

"Oh, so it is true, then, that you had such an appointment?"

The Mexican saw that he had betrayed himself, and he bit his thin lips savagely.

"Caramba! You ze fiend!" he hissed.

"Thanks! You're complimentary."

"Now, Mr. Rocket, it was at your request that the present honorable company assembled beneath my humble roof," said Hank Blower, in his exhibition voice, with a great deal of gesticulation. "I should like you to make known your object in thus bringing us together at this nitching hour of night, when, as the immortal bard says, churchyards—"

"Cheese it, cully!" broke in Munch Jones, in extreme disgust.

Mr. Blower looked indignant, and Munch with his chin stuck out, was just tilting his cap forward in his most aggressive style.

Hey Rube saw that trouble was imminent, so he turned it off by remarking:

"Would it not be well to give Mademoiselle Rosa a more comfortable seat than that wooden stool?"

An appeal to Mr. Blower's gallantry never passed unheeded, and in half a minute he had seated Rosa in a throne chair that he said belonged to the King of Spain two centuries ago.

"What is this instrument on the table?" continued Hey Rube, pointing to the box.

"A phonograph of the latest pattern, with many improvements that have not been put upon any other phonograph up to date."

The question and answer were both given in a solemn, judicial way that evidently had great weight with Budworth Buddicombe. He was sitting on his drum, with eyes and ears wide open.

"You say that this is an improved phonograph?" continued Hey Rube.

"Yes, sir."

"What is a phonograph?" interrupted Munch Jones.

"A phonograph is a talking machine," answered Hank Blower, impressively. "Place this instrument in a room where a conversation is going on, and it will take an impression of the sounds on the wax that is fastened around the cylinder. These sounds can be reproduced afterward as often as you please, provided the machine was in operation at the time of the conversation. My instrument works automatically by clockwork."

All this talk was too dry for Munch Jones, and he was yawning desperately.

"If," continued Hank Blower, still in his exhibition voice, "the gentleman will step forward and ask a question or make a remark into this trumpet that is connected with the machine, I will guarantee that the words will be repeated by machinery."

He beckoned to Munch Jones, who, coming forward, unwillingly said, in his toughest tone: "Oh, give us a rest!"

Hank Blower quickly touched a spring at the side of the box, and a ghostly voice from somewhere, repeated with a sort of sigh:

"Oh, give us a rest!"

That was enough for Munch. He stepped hastily into the background, and for the next half-hour forgot to either tilt his hat or protrude his chin.

"Vhat does all zis nonsense mean?" asked Sondaz. "I know nozzing about ze phonograph."

"Perhaps not; but the phonograph knows something about you," answered Hank Blower, with a smile. He thought that his repartee was rather neat, and he was proud of it.

He touched the spring again, after wrapping what looked like a sheet of dirty brown paper around the cylinder inside. There was the clicking that had so annoyed the Mexican in the parlor of the India-rubber house, and then a faint whispering:

"Vhat ees zat?"

"Easily explained," answered Hank Blower, cheerily, as he busied himself about the machine. "The conversation I intend to reproduce took place some distance from the phonograph, and hence the waves of sound were imperfectly impressed upon the diaphragm."

"What a blooming lot of hard words that are knows," commented Bud, unconscious that he had spoken audibly. He was looking at Blower in absolute awe.

Hank saw this, and it tickled him. He went on:

"The result is that the conversation comes only in a whisper that cannot be heard distinctly. I take this cone of metal, of peculiar construction, fit it into the trumpet of the phonograph thus. The peculiar metal cone is called a microphone, and its purpose is to magnify sound. Mr. Rocket, when you are ready, I will set the instrument going, and I think we shall be able to hear it easily."

"What a farce zis ees!" sneered Sondaz.

"Is it? You may find it is a tragedy before we get through with you," retorted Hank, indignantly.

"Senor Fernando Sondaz, you had a conversation with Mlle. Rosa in Detroit yesterday, in the course of which you wrung from her a promise that she would give you a large sum of money on condition that you would allow her to get a divorce from you without opposition on your part, you claiming that she was married to you in Vera Cruz."

"She ees ma wife," said Sondaz, sullenly.

"You made her promise what I said?"

"Yees, an' I haf ze paper wiz her signature."

"Exactly. It isn't worth the paper it is written on, from a legal standpoint, but that is no matter. Your only object in making her sign it was to frighten her. You are too smart a man to think that the paper would hold good in law."

The Mexican grinned sardonically. He did not know what was coming next, but he was determined to fight to the last.

"Vell?" he snarled.

"I propose to show, by this phonograph, in the presence of these witnesses, that you confessed to Mademoiselle Rosa, in the parlor of the India-rubber house, Detroit, after persuading her to sign the paper, that the so-called marriage in Vera Cruz was a mockery, and that your only reason for inducing her to go through the ceremony was that you might get control of her property in Vera Cruz and other cities."

"Caramba! You haf ze pretty story."

"Mr. Blower, please get your instrument ready for operation," said Hey Rube, quietly.

"Certainly," acquiesced Hank Blower, with alacrity.

The detective stepped forward, of course dragging Sondaz with him, the two being handcuffed together.

"You cut ma wrist!" grumbled the Mexican.

"Never mind; you'll get over that. Mr. Blower, set the cylinder at the spot I showed you an hour ago," directed Hey Rube.

"All right, sir. Here it is."

"Good. Set it going. Now, Senor Fernando Sondaz, and all of you, ladies and gentlemen, please listen to the words that will issue from the microphone," said the detective, looking around the tent.

It was an impressive scene. The quaint furniture and decorations of the tent; the stuffed birds and animals scattered about; two wax figures of men, used in a ventriloquial entertainment, now covered with a white cloth, and presenting a ghostly appearance, as the lights from several coal-oil lamps flickered upon them; the eager faces of the living creatures who crowded around the instrument that was expected to play such an important part in the proceedings now in course of transaction! All the details of the picture were in keeping in their subdued character, and out-of-the-world appearance.

The Mexican alone tried to look unconcerned, and he failed signally.

With fingers that trembled a little, in spite of his professional dignity, Hank Blower touched the spring. There was the usual clicking, and then, slowly and distinctly, a whisper, that no one could mistake for any voice but that of Fernando Sondaz, uttered the words:

"Ze marriage vas a mock marriage, and you not ma wife at all!"

The Mexican turned his head like a hunted rat seeking a means of escape, while the phonograph went on, monotonously, but this time in the accents of Mlle. Rosa:

"You villain! You wretched creature!"

"That will do," said Hey Rube, as he touched the spring of the phonograph himself, and stopped the turning of the cylinder.

"Well, if that ain't the bloomingest!" ejaculated Budworth Buddicombe.

"Now, Fernando Sondaz, I should like you to repeat to these witnesses here what you said in Detroit when the phonograph was listening unknown to you. It is an old saying that walls have ears, but you would never have suspected that musical box of having a tongue and ears, too, would you?"

"Caramba!"

"Confess before these witnesses that you lied when you said that the marriage in Vera Cruz was a true one, and that you told the truth when you declared—in the hearing of the phonograph, mark you—that it was a mockery."

"Caramba! Anything else?" sneered Sondaz.

"Yes. Then, I shall require you to confess that the hold you have maintained over the property of Alice and Timothy Trevilyan, and the coercion you have brought to bear on the young lady to induce her to accept you as her husband at the end of the year, was secured by forgery!"

"Forgery?" exclaimed Alice, starting up.

"Yes, my dear," answered Hey Rube, as he motioned to her to sit down. "He hid your father's real will, (which left everything to you and Tim with immediate possession of the estate in Mexico,) and forged another containing the provisions with which you are familiar, and which, I am glad to know, are so hateful to you."

"Caramba! Eet ees a lie!" hissed the Mexican.

"Oh, no, it isn't, Fernando. Any more than it is a lie that you were in a cutting scrape at Deadwood, and another at Vera Cruz. Any more than that you stole Mlle. Rosa's jewels yesterday. Any more than that you got me into a cellar in a house on Belle Isle, and tried to murder me as I came out. Any more than that your life for the last ten years has, to my knowledge, been a chain of crimes, for any one of which you would spend the greater part of your

life in prison if the parties injured choose to appear against you!"

Sondaz writhed as Hey Rube pitilessly gave his biography.

"Now, Sondaz," went on the detective, "the will of Mr. Trevilyan is in my possession, and has been for a week past."

The Mexican made a sudden turn as if he would tear the will out of the detective's pocket.

"Keep still, Sondaz. The paper is not here, and if it were you could not get it."

"Caramba!"

The infuriated Mexican, whose face happened to be toward the opening that led to the outside of the tent, had seen some one peeping in.

With a mighty effort, he dragged his wrist out of the handcuff by which he was secured to Hey Rube, and still with his hands held together by the other pair of manacles, bounded through the doorway and disappeared.

CHAPTER XXX.

SONDAZ AVENGED AT LAST.

THE Mexican looked neither to the right nor left as he dashed across the circus-grounds.

The moon, which had been bright early in the night, had now nearly sunk out of sight, and only a faint glimmer of light relieved the murky darkness of the great common upon which the circus tents were pitched.

Flying across the ground, as if seeking the shelter of the menagerie tent, was the figure of a man, barely discernible to any but the eyes of hate!

Fernando Sondaz never lost sight of him for an instant from the moment that he saw him peeping in the entrance to Hank Blower's tent.

The Mexican, in spite of his manacled hands, which, as every one knows, make very great speed impossible, dashed on, regardless of everything but the fugitive.

"Caramba!" he panted. "I will keel him—keel him—keel him! Ze false sneak. He s'all know what eet ees to play ze fool wiz Fernando Sondaz. Sol Feexer—ha! ha!—I feex you!"

With a mirthless laugh, that had a most uncanny effect in the darkness, the Mexican redoubled his efforts to catch the flying Sol Fixer.

There was no doubt about it! It was indeed Sol Fixer who was trying so hard to avoid a collision with the Mexican.

The latter reached the menagerie tent, just as Sol flew around a corner.

With a bound and a yell the Mexican was upon him, and had stricken him to the earth with one blow of his handcuffs.

"Now, Sol Feexer, I geet even wiz you! You vant ze jewels, eh? Zen you gif me avay to Hey Rube, and feex things all for yourself, so!"

"Let off my back, you imp!" groaned Sol, as he struggled vainly with his assailant.

The blow with the handcuffs had partly stunned him.

"No, Sol Feexer, I will not geet off your back till I keel you. So! Caramba! You geet me into zis trouble. I go to jail! So! Zen you go out of ze world!"

He raised his two hands to strike with the handcuffs again, but Sol rolled to one side.

He had recovered somewhat from the effects of the blow he had received, and seeing that Sondaz was absolutely frenzied with passion, made up his mind in his dogged fashion, that he must kill the Mexican to save his own life.

His bowie-knife was in a side-pocket in a sheath. If he could get at it, he would make short work of his maddened assailant.

The Mexican was now kneeling on his chest, trying to get a chance to strike again with the handcuffs. He was utterly reckless of consequences. His sole idea was to kill Sol Fixer.

"You laugh at me on ze Belle Isle, eh? You say I coward! So! I show you now whether I a coward! Caramba! Gr-r-r-r-r!"

He actually howled in his rage.

Sol, who had been watching his opportunity, released himself from the Mexican's knees, and sat up, drawing his bowie-knife with his right hand.

The Mexican saw the gleam of steel, and grasped the blade of the weapon with both his manacled hands, never heeding the blood that streamed down from the cuts it inflicted.

"Caramba! Geef me zis knife!"

"Wal, not exactly, Sondaz. I guess I'll keep this hyar knife at present," replied Sol, as he tried to pull it away.

Sondaz held it in a desperate grip, and for perhaps half a minute the two men, both on their knees now, pulled at the bowie-knife in silence.

Then Sol Fixer, who had the advantage of free hands, butted his head into the Mexican's face, and at the same time, possessed himself of the weapon.

Sondaz, gnashing his teeth, raised his manacles for another blow.

It was a fatal action. It left his breast completely exposed, and the next instant the bowie-knife had reached his heart. He fell back, and, with a convulsive struggle, was dead.

As he struggled in the death-agony, the dying man's feet struck Fixer a violent blow on the knee, causing him to fall forward upon the body of his slain foe.

The revenge of Fernando lived after his death, for as Sol Fixer fell forward, with the knife still in his hand, the point was driven into his own breast.

"Dere dey are, on der ground," exclaimed Munch Jones, as he led the party that had followed Fernando Sondaz from Hank Blower's tent.

"All of a blooming lump, like Brown's cows at Islington," added Bud, who had left his base-drum in the tent in his eagerness to follow the Mexican.

Rube did not speak. Something about the position of the two men suggested the truth.

He bent over them and lighted a match, which burned steadily in the still early morning air.

He saw in an instant how the bowie-knife had done its work, but he felt the pulse of each man in turn, almost mechanically, for he knew life was extinct as soon as he saw the nature of the wounds.

"Sol Fixer!" exclaimed Munch, "an' he went an' died afore I had a chance to lick him for what he did to me on Belle Isle, and while I was clowning in the ring for him yesterday. Jist my luck!"

"Well, he always was a blooming mean cove," added Bud, "but the Mexican could knock the spots off him in that respect!"

"Boys, it is not for us to judge those that have passed away," said Rocket, solemnly. "They are beyond the reach of earthly justice now. Go into the menagerie tent and tell some of the boys to carry them in and watch them until the coroner comes in the morning."

"I'm kinder sorry, too!" whispered Jim Swan. "There's good in everybody, and Sol Fixer was brave, anyhow. As for the Mexican—"

"Well, what can you say for him?" asked Munch.

"I did not know him very well," answered Jim Swan, quietly.

Munch Jones bowed his head under the implied rebuke, and all felt that Jim Swan had hit upon the true way of pronouncing an epitaph that circumstances would not allow to be a eulogy.

In a handsome house in Detroit live Mr. and Mrs. Reuben Rocket. They have large interests there, as well as in Mexico and New York, and are understood to be very wealthy. The husband is well known among business men as a shrewd, but unassuming young fellow, who could make his mark in any active walk of life. At present, however, he is content to look after his estates and enjoy himself, for he has not long been married. It is whispered that Mrs. Rocket was originally a Mrs. Rosa Hartley, of Vera Cruz, and that she was for some months in public life as a circus-rider, being none other than that well-known Detroit favorite, Mlle. Rosa. However all this may be, it is certain that no couple in Detroit are better liked than Mr. and Mrs. Reuben Rocket.

Alice and Tim Trevilyan have left the Great Astronomic Circus and Menagerie, and are living on their estate in Vera Cruz together. Alice is the belle of the city, and under the watchful care of a maiden aunt, her father's sister, goes into society a great deal, and makes up in present enjoyment for past trials. Tim is one of the best horsemen in Mexico.

Budworth Buddicombe, Munch Jones, Jim Swan and Hank Blower all remain with the circus. It is doubtful whether Bud or Munch can remember how many times they have, when the subject of circus riots came up, related, with the greatest gusto, the details of the battle in Detroit, when they, with a few more, cleaned out the town rowdies under the leadership of Rube Rocket, the Tent Detective.

THE END.

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